

WILD WEST

WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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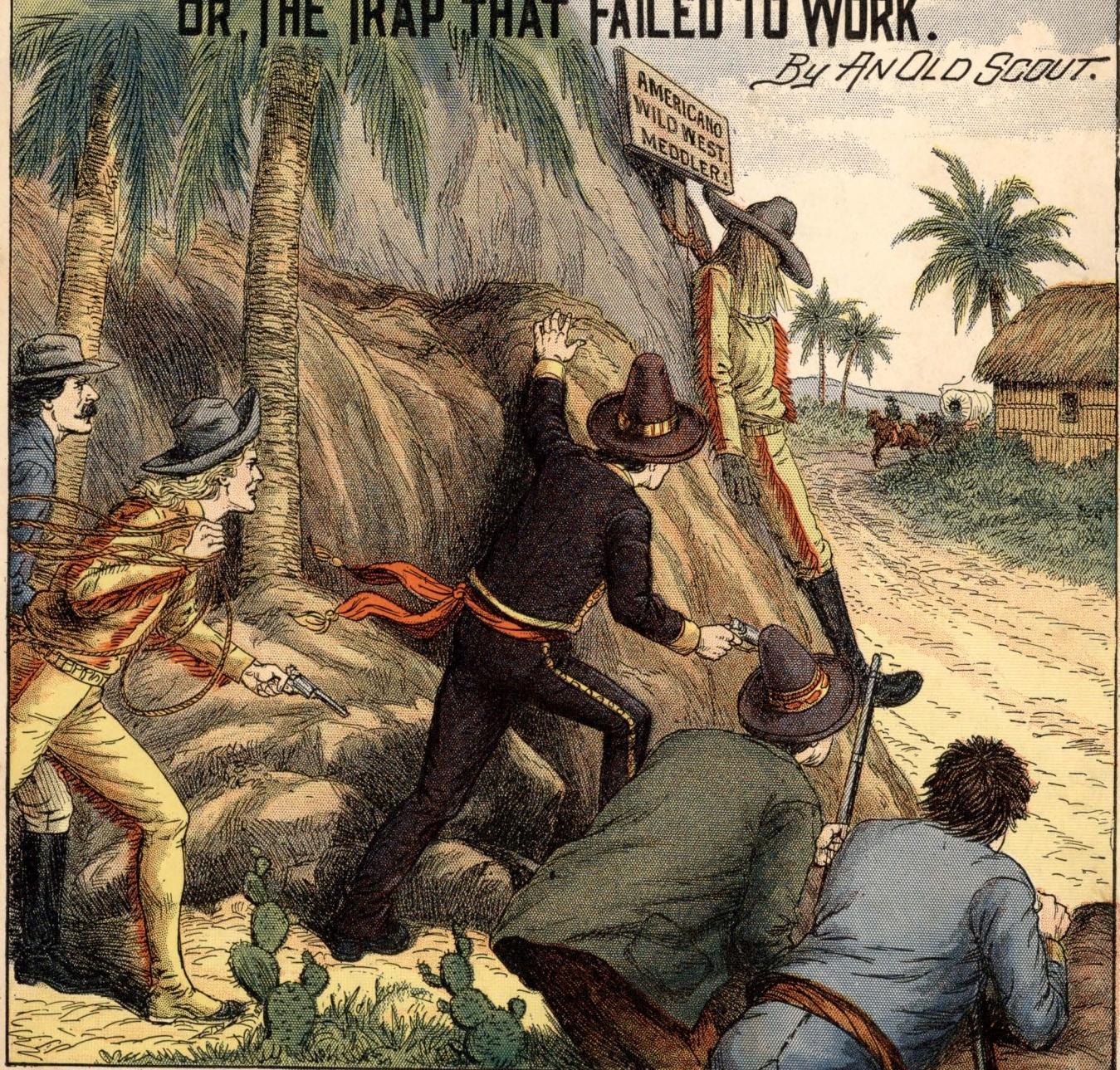
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NEW YORK, APRIL 10, 1908.

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YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE GREASER GUIDE; OR, THE TRAP THAT FAILED TO WORK.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Wild and Charlie could hardly suppress a laugh. The Greaser Guide and his men were crouching near the hanging effigy, watching the prairie schooner as it came around the bend. They thought their trap would surely work, and were elated.

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Young Wild West and the Greaser Guide

OR,

The Trap that Failed to Work

By AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TRAIL TO YUMA.

Camped in a rather desolate-looking spot in the very heart of the Gila Range, in the southwestern part of Arizona, not many miles from the border of Mexico, were four men.

Three of them were Americans and the other a Mexican, commonly called a "greaser" in that section of the country.

The Americans were miners, who had prospected until they struck it rich in one of the most forsaken parts of the mountains, and they had set out the day before the opening of our story to get to Yuma, where they hoped to dispose of the gold dust they had accumulated.

The greaser was the guide they had hired to pilot them there, and who had agreed to take them by the safest and quickest route.

All four looked as though they had roughed it, for their clothing was pretty well tattered, and the old-fashioned prairie schooner the greaser guide had provided for them to carry their wealth in had the appearance of being ready to fall apart at almost any time.

But appearances are deceiving sometimes, and so it was in this case.

The old prairie schooner had been strongly built, and the rough mountain roads did not seem to weaken it in the least.

It was near sunset and the travelers were tired from their first day's journey, it being a new thing to them, since they had confined themselves to the little mining camp, where they had made their pile, for several months.

The Americans bore the names of Merrill, Scott and

Dennison, and the greaser guide was known as Big Mike.

There was something about the looks of this man that would surely have made one suspicious of him, for his swarthy, scarred face was hardly pleasant to look upon and his eyes had a wicked gleam in them and were shifty, giving him an aspect of treachery.

But he had been recommended to the Americans as being one who could be trusted, and who knew the way to Yuma better than any man to be found in that section, so they hired him to guide them there.

"Well, Mike," said Dan Merrill, who seemed to be the leader of the successful prospectors, "we didn't strike the water you said we would find here, after all."

"No, señor," was the reply. "I make a little mistake. It will be noon to-morrow when we come to da water. See that peak over there? That is the one; not this one."

He pointed to a peak that was fully thirty miles away and then to one that was directly above the camp.

"I see, Mike. It is a good thing that we have a full barrel of water yet. That will hold until to-morrer noon, all right."

"But a good drink of fresh water is better than that we've got in ther barrel, though," spoke up Scott, shrugging his shoulders.

"Water is not plenty here, señor," Big Mike answered, coolly. "We have to take what we get."

"That is true enough," remarked Dennison, the other of the trio. "I reckon we kin make out good enough. When ther water is used ter make ther coffee it's all right, an' that's one good thing, anyhow."

"To be on da desert, with no water, an' da sun burning right through da body, is not so pleasant," said the greaser guide, speaking in a manner that Merrill could

not help thinking was rather peculiar. "I have seen Americans that have died from da want of water, senors."

Big Mike had lived long enough among the American people to acquire the language, and it was only now and then that he let drop a word that was partly broken Spanish.

Dennison, who was acting as the cook for the little party, now kindled a fire and proceeded to prepare the supper.

The country they were traveling through was almost arid, so there was no game to be found there, and they had brought with them a quantity of smoked meat and other provisions for use during the four or five days' journey to Yuma.

The big prairie schooner contained the gold dust and water barrels, and a couple of burros were used to carry their provisions.

Though the miners knew it was a risky thing for them to set out with so much gold over a route that was as dangerous as it was lonesome, they were so anxious to get to Yuma that they threw aside their fears and started.

Then the guide had assured them that they would surely not meet a soul on the way, unless it might be some forlorn prospectors, who had lost their way.

But as the shades of night came on the three men began to grow a little uneasy, though neither of them remarked anything concerning why.

Big Mike seemed to be in a very pleasant mood—they had put him down as being possessed of very little in the way of light-heartedness—and this seemed rather strange to them.

He joked and laughed as they ate their supper, and when it was over with he rolled a cigarette and sat down upon a rock to enjoy a smoke from a cigarette.

The sun had disappeared now, and as the shadows deepened Big Mike arose and went to the wagon.

He came back with a guitar, and, again seating himself, he tuned it and struck up an air.

The Americans knew he had it with him, of course, but this was the first he had played upon the instrument.

A Mexican seems to be gifted with the art of getting music from a guitar, and the guide was no exception.

He twanged away, the music echoing among the bare rocks that surrounded the camp, causing a sort of cheerfulness that was appreciated by the lucky prospectors.

After a while the deep voice of the greaser broke forth into a love song of his people, and to have heard him without seeing him one would have declared that it was a love-sick swain playing as he longed for his sweethearth.

But to sit right before him and listen such a supposition would have vanished entirely.

Big Mike had just struck in on the third verse of his song when the clatter of hoofs interrupted him, and he sprang to his feet and put down his guitar.

"Somebody come, senors!" he exclaimed. "Most likely friends."

But, in spite of the words of assurance, the three men put their hands on their revolvers.

"Hello, strangers!" called out a dashing-looking boy, as he rode from behind a big rock and reined in the magnificent sorrel stallion he was mounted upon within a few

feet of the camp. "We saw the smoke from your fire and heard the singing, so we thought we would come on and investigate. How are you all?"

"Pretty good," answered Merril, his face lighting up, as he saw the boy. "What is the matter? Did you lose your way in this wild an' lonesome spot?"

"Well, not exactly. We struck a trail yesterday, which we thought might lead us to Yuma, so we followed it up. You are the first people we have seen since we left a ranch we stopped at the day before yesterday. But what is the matter with your man there? His jaw seems to be dropping out of place. I reckon he was surprised to find that there was any one around but you folks."

Big Mike stood with wide-open mouth, naught but surprise depicted on his ugly looking countenance.

It was evident that he certainly had not expected to see the boy when he heard the clatter of hoofs, and his surprise had certainly got the best of him.

But he quickly shut his mouth and put on an air of indifference.

"Where you come from?" he asked.

"All over," was the quick reply. "What are you here for? Are you taking these men to Yuma?"

"That is right, senor," was the reply. "You pay me some money and I take you to Yuma, too. I know the way; you no find the way alone."

"Oh, that is all right, my greaser friend. I reckon I know the way all right," was the cool retort. "I've got a couple of friends with me who know it, too. Here they come now. I rode ahead of them to find out what was going on when I heard the singing and music."

Just then up rode another boy and a man, who was plainly a thorough Westerner, for his long, black hair hung over his shoulders, and his weather-beaten face showed that he was well used to all sorts of climates.

The dashing-looking boy was attired in a fancy hunting costume of buckskin, and was armed with a Winchester rifle, brace of revolvers and a hunting knife.

Handsome of face and figure, and a wealth of chestnut hair hanging over his broad and shapely shoulders, he made the true picture of the ideal boy-hero of the Wild West.

His two friends were attired in similar fashion, and were armed the same.

Though two of them were but boys, they were only so in years, for they had been born and brought up in the West, and had been through all sorts of dangers from their earliest recollection.

"You are welcome to join us, boys," said Dan Merril. "If you haven't picked out a camp yet, here is the place to stop."

"Thank you, pard. I reckon we'll accept your invitation. But we have some ladies with us and a couple of Chinamen, too. They will be along directly. If that won't make any difference to you we will stop here with you for the night—or right by you, I should say."

"The fact that you have ladies with you sartinly won't make no difference," Merril assured him.

"All right. I like the looks of you fellows, and that is why I will stop with you. Been out prospecting, eh?"

"Yes, an' we've been putty lucky, too," spoke up Scott. "We'll be mighty glad when we git ter Yuma, though."

"The senors should no tell their business to strangers," said the greaser guide, flashing a glance at the speaker.

"That is about right, Mr. Greaser," said the boy with the long, chestnut hair. "But it strikes me that they were a little bit out of the way when they hired such a galoot as you to guide them to Yuma. I can't help it if you don't like what I am saying, for I have got a way of always speaking what I think, when a person gives me cause to do it. I don't know who you are, but I'll bet that if you are weighed you will be found wanting!"

Big Mike scowled fiercely at the boy and slipped his hand toward a big knife that hung in a sheath to his belt.

"Easy, Mike," cautioned Merril. "You shouldn't have said what you did. Any one with any judgment at all would know that these people are not crooks. They are perfectly welcome here, and also to know our business."

"All right, Senor Merril," answered the Mexican; and then he turned and picked up his guitar and strode to the wagon with it.

"Who are you, if you have no objections in telling?" Merril asked, as he again turned to the dashing boy on the sorrel stallion.

"Young Wild West is my name," was the reply. "These two gentlemen with me are Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, my partners. You may have heard of us, and you may not."

"I've heard of yer!" spoke up Dennison, as he ran forward and put out his hand. "Shake, will yer, Young Wild West?"

"Certainly!"

The hands of the two met and closed in a hearty grip.

Then Dennison shook with the boy's companions, after which he turned to his companions and said:

"Boys, I'm introducin' yer ter Young Wild West, ther Champion Deadshot an' Prince of ther Saddle. He's only a boy, but he's a terror ter them what goes wrong an' a helper ter them what goes right. Hooray fur Young Wild West!"

Merril and Scott joined him in giving a cheer, and then they quickly made known their names.

It was just then that the rest of Young Wild West's party appeared in view, and as Big Mike's eyes beheld two very pretty girls and a comely young woman riding forward his shifty eyes glinted in a peculiar, not to say, dangerous, way.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREASER GUIDE IS SUSPICIONED.

Young Wild West noticed the look that shone from the eyes of the big greaser, but he said nothing just then.

"Come on, girls!" he called out. "I reckon we'll camp right here alongside these gentlemen. There is nothing like a little company, especially in such a forsaken place as this."

The girls, as our hero and his partner always termed them, even though the scout's wife was a woman, as far

as age went, rode up, smiling, as though they were glad to meet the travelers.

All hands dismounted, and then an introduction took place, and the three lucky prospectors found that they had met Arietta Murdock and Eloise Gardner, the sweethearts of Young Wild West and Jim Dart, and Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie.

No one bothered to introduce the two Chinamen, though right here we may as well state that they were brothers, named Hop Wah and Wing Wah, and had been in the employ of our hero and his partners for two or three years.

When Dennison had said that Young Wild West was the Champion Deadshot and also the Prince of the Saddle he was only speaking what he had heard friends of the dashing boy say. But it was surely the truth, in every sense of the word, however.

Ever since he had been able to climb up on the back of a mustang the boy had been steadily gaining in the knowledge and control of a horse, and he was at the time of his introduction to the reader without a peer as a skillful rider.

And it was the same way with the management of firearms. Constant practice had made him a deadshot with both the rifle and revolver, and because of his many victories over cowboys and other Westerners who claimed to be champions at shooting, he had been nicknamed the Champion Deadshot.

But Wild, as his friends always called him, was ever ready to defend his title, though he never boasted of it.

It was through his wonderful shooting and riding and great coolness and good judgment in times of danger that had won him the respect and admiration of the inhabitants of that part of the country known as the Wild West at the time of which we write.

His partners were experts in woodcraft, and were as brave as any border hero could be.

Cheyenne Charlie had been a scout in active service for a number of years, but shortly after he met Young Wild West and went to the Black Hills with him he decided to stick to the dashing young deadshot, and he was very proud to be called his partner.

It was the same with Jim Dart in this respect, and the two were never happier than when in some danger, with Wild to lead them through it.

The girls had become accustomed to the outdoor life, they were leading, and they liked it better than any other way. The first time they made an adventurous trip with Wild and his partners had made them eager to go with them again, and so it had continued until they became permanent members of the party.

All of them, including the girls, were interested in enough mines to bring them in more of an income than they could spend, so they put their time in riding about the West and Southwest, in search of adventure.

As we find them in that desolate part of Arizona they had come down from Phoenix just to do a little exploring in the mountains.

They had stopped at a ranch about a hundred miles to the east of where they now were, and after leaving that, as our hero had stated, they had not met a human being until they came upon the camp of the three miners.

The very moment Wild got a look at the face of the greaser guide he put him down as a scoundrel, and when once he came to a conclusion he was generally right.

Merril, Scott and Dennison were certainly delighted to have the party stop with them over night, and it may have been that the guide was, too.

But it was for different reasons, if he was.

Young Wild West looked around the camp, and then he shook his head.

"No water here, I see," he observed.

"No; our guide says that we will strike some when we get to that peak over there. He thought we would find it here, but he made a mistake in his calculations."

"Have you got water?" Big Mike spoke up, looking hard at the young deadshot.

"Oh, I reckon we've got enough to last another day," was the cool retort.

"That's good; we no got plenty."

Cheyenne Charlie was a pretty outspoken man, and he had been keeping remarkably still. But he evidently had formed a dislike for the greaser, and he blurted out, sharply:

"I reckon you wouldn't want us ter have any of what you've got, not if we was about starvin' fur it, you big galoot! I kin tell by ther cut of yer what you are. You've got a hangdog look, though I won't say that you'd kill a man fur as little as fifty dollars!"

"Senor," retorted the Mexican, his eyes flashing with rage, "I will make you suffer for what you say! I honest man; I no kill nobody!"

"Good! Then yer won't kill me, will yer? But don't git r'iled. I ain't got much use fur an ugly lookin' greaser, anyhow. But if yer do take a notion ter git square with me fur what I said you'll find that I'll be right on hand."

"Keep still, Charlie," spoke up our hero. "The man can't help it if he has a bad look. Let him alone. He may be all right."

"He may be; but I don't think he is. An' I'll bet you don't, either, Wild."

Anna shot a warning glance at her outspoken husband, and then he subsided.

But it could be seen by all present that the greaser was angry enough to kill the scout then and there.

However, he was one of the sort who can bide their time, and he let the matter drop.

The work of getting their camp in shape was soon done by the two Chinamen, and it was just about dark when the fire was lighted to cook their evening meal.

The prospectors had urged them to eat from their stock of provisions, but Young Wild West declined to do this, on the ground that there was no telling how much they might need what they had before they got to Yuma.

Wing, the Chinese cook, soon had a fire going, and then it was not long before the supper was under way.

Young Wild West had selected the side of a hill, about twenty yards from the spot where the smouldering fire of the prospectors' camp lay.

He did not mean to mix right in with them, since there was a couple of tents which they slept in nights, and he did not want to be too close to the greaser.

Not that he was afraid of Big Mike, for that was something entirely out of the question for Young Wild West.

He did not fear the worst villain living.

However, the look that the greaser had cast at the girls made him think that it was best to keep them away from him.

After our friends had eaten their supper Merril walked over and took a seat on a rock.

"Do you know one thing, Young Wild West?" he said in a low tone of voice. "I have come to believe that our guide is goin' to prove treacherous."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised, Mr. Merril," was the reply.

"I never had the least suspicion of him until just before you folks showed up. Then he acted different from the way he had been doin'; an' when he heard you comin' he acted just as though he knew who it was, an' was expectin' 'em. What has happened since makes me think that he means to rob us an' that he has got some friends out this way to help him to do it."

"Well, he'll have to have quite a few if he does it, I reckon. We are not in the habit of allowing folks to be robbed any kind of fashion. The big galoot had better look out what he does. How much money have you got with you, anyway? Is it enough to make him feel as though it was worth while to rob you?"

"We haven't got hardly any money," was the reply. "But we've got about fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust in that wagon."

"Ah! I see. Well, you can bet that the greaser guide wants some of that. The chances are that he will have some of his gang come along before the night is over, and there will be a lively time of it around here. Don't be alarmed, Merril. Don't do much sleeping to-night, either."

The prospector shrugged his shoulders.

It was plain that he was very uneasy.

When he cast a glance over to his own camp and saw that Big Mike was sitting right where he could watch him, he became more convinced than ever that the guide had hired out to them just for the purpose of robbing them.

It was not more than ten minutes before this suspicion was verified.

Then the call of a nightbird suddenly sounded on the still night air.

"That wasn't a bird," said Young Wild West. "You can bet all the gold dust you have got, Merril, that it is a signal from the greaser's friends. They are after you, all right!"

Merril nodded, and when he saw the greaser walk leisurely away from the camp into the darkness he looked at our hero and said:

"What are we goin' to do?"

"Do?" was the reply. "Why, get ready for business. Boys, keep your eyes open."

"You bet yer life we will, Wild!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, as he started from the camp. "I'll jest see what that greaser galoot is up ter."

CHAPTER III.

HOP ENTERTAINS BIG MIKE.

Wild made no objections, so Charlie was soon lost in the darkness.

The scout was simply itching to make the discovery that the greaser guide was "crooked," as he called it.

Of that he was certain, so it was for him to prove it.

He moved through the darkness, dodging from rock to rock, and in a very short space of time he heard low voices ahead of him.

"I reckon I'll soon find out somethin'," he muttered under his breath. "Ther sneakin' coyote fetched them three fellers here jest ter rob 'em. I'll bet he had it all fixed so some of his friends would come out an' meet him here. Well, they're goin' ter git fooled, as sure as my name are Cheyenne Charlie!"

The scout moved forward, and, reaching a rock, he peered from behind it and saw the dim outlines of two men standing but a few feet from him.

One was the greaser guide. Of that he was sure.

But the other was a stranger, which simply bore out his suspicions.

They were talking in such low tones that Charlie could hardly hear what they said, but he strained his ears and listened, and when he caught the words, "Twelve o'clock to-night," he gave a nod of extreme satisfaction.

He could only catch a few words then, for the two men parted; the guide walking leisurely toward the camp.

The scout moved along swiftly and managed to get there ahead of him.

He was sitting down when he saw Big Mike come in, he not having said a word yet.

"Well," said Merril, anxiously, "did you find out anything?"

"I reckon I did," was the reply. "Ther big galoot met a man out there an' they was doin' some mighty tall talkin' in whispers. I only heard enough ter make me know that somethin' is goin' ter happen at twelve o'clock to-night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wild. "I thought so!"

"There was only one man there," went on the scout. "But it are most likely that there's more of 'em close by."

"Maybe the two of them mean to overpower us, and then make off with the wagon?" Merril ventured.

Our hero shook his head.

"They would know better than that," he said. "What could two of them do, especially as we are here now? Why, that greaser wouldn't stand a ghost of a show. He knows very well that we are not the ones to go to sleep and give him a chance to do his dirty work. I reckon he has seen and heard enough for that."

"Oh, there may be a dozen of 'em," spoke up Charlie. "But what's ther odds? I reckon your gold is safe all right, boss. All's you've got ter do is ter keep awake till after twelve o'clock, an' have your shooter ready fur business. Jest see ter it that ther other two does ther same thing."

"I will, you can bet!" was the reply. "I am sorry that we made the mistake to trust the greaser."

"Oh, you'll get to Yuma all right, and you'll take your gold dust with you," our hero said, reassuringly. "I am mighty glad that we happened along as we did. We always like to be able to do a good turn for those deserving of it, and it will give us a chance to stir up a bit. Things get altogether too tame sometimes, you know."

"You talk as though you rather like gettin' in trouble with such fellers as Big Mike."

"Well, to tell the truth, I do like it," was the reply. "And so do my two partners. The girls would think it out of place if we didn't have a scrimmage with outlaws or bad Indians now and then. The outdoor life they are living would lose its charms if there was no danger attached to it, you know."

"You seem to be a peculiar sort of a party, if I may say it," Merril declared.

"Well, when you get used to a certain way of living it comes a little hard on you if you make a change, I reckon."

"Maybe so."

"Now, Merril, to give you a good chance to let your two partners know what is in the wind, I will send one of our Chinamen over to entertain your rascally guide. He will soon have him so much interested that you can go ahead and explain the whole thing to them, I'll guarantee that."

"I don't know about that. I heard over at the mining camp that Big Mike was a hater of Chinese. He shot one, they say, and came near being lynched for it. If it had not been that he had so many who feared him in the camp he would have gone the way of all sinners."

"He'll go that way, all right, afore we git through with him," declared the scout, significantly. "He'll be dead ag'in us fur blockin' his plans, an' he'll hang around lookin' fur revenge till he gits his medicine."

Wild now called Hop, the Chinaman.

When he said Hop would be able to hold the attention of the greaser guide while Merril let his partners know what was up, he knew just what he was talking about.

Though he was about as innocent-looking as any Celestial that ever crossed the Pacific, Hop Wah was far from being that.

The fact was that he was a very clever sleight-of-hand performer, and when it came to gambling he had yet to meet his match.

He always had the necessary articles about his person to perform no end of mystifying tricks, and, being a sort of humorist, in his way, he was quite amusing at times.

"Hop," said Wild, looking at him in a businesslike way, "you go over there and get the greaser interested. Mr. Merril wants to have a little talk with his two friends, and he don't want the galoot to hear what he is saying. You understand?"

"Me undelstand, Misler Wild," was the ready reply. "Me makee um gleaser velly muchee intelested, so be."

"Look out that he don't shoot you or stick a knife in you; he don't like Chinese," spoke up Merril.

"Me lookee out, allee samee," was the retort, while a smile that was "childlike and bland" crept over the yellow features of the Celestial.

Hop promptly walked over to the spot where the greaser was sitting, humming a queer sort of tune that might have been one of his own making or one of the favorite airs of his native country, as far as anyone there could tell.

Big Mike was rolling a cigarette, and he scowled when he saw the Chinaman approaching.

"Velly nicee night, so be," remarked Hop, smiling at him.

"Yes."

"Me likee you play allee samee lillee tune, so be."

"Get out, dog of a heathen!" hissed the Mexican. "Caramba! I no like da Chinee."

"Me likee um nicee greaser, allee samee," was the unexpected reply, and then the Celestial pulled a coin from his pocket and handed it to the guide.

As it was nothing more than a counterfeit of a five-dollar gold piece, Hop was not nearly as liberal as the villain thought he was.

But he did not stop to examine the coin, taking it for granted that it was all right.

Hop sat down.

"You gottee lillee tanglefoot?" he asked, speaking in a low tone of voice. "Me gottee velly muchee pain, and me likee lillee dlop of tanglefoot."

It was a failing of the clever Chinaman to have a desire for strong drink, and he was simply doing what was required of him and at the same time helping his own case a little.

Big Mike certainly had liquor along with him.

He had stocked up quite largely with it before setting out to guide the prospectors to Yuma.

Since he had been presented with the coin, he felt that he should show himself a little friendly, so he nodded, and, rising to his feet, went to the place where he had his belongings.

He came back and, nodding to Hop to follow him, walked behind a neighboring rock.

"Here!" he said, pulling a small flask from his pocket.

"Da Chinee have this. It very god whisky."

Hop thanked him warmly and, removing the cork, smelled the contents.

This test must have proved quite satisfactory, for he took a good pull at the flask, and then put it in his pocket.

"Lat velly goodee," he declared. "Misler Big Mike allee samee nicee man, so be."

The guide gave a grunt, as though he did not much appreciate the Chinaman's flattering words, and then he turned and went back to the rock he had been sitting upon.

But Hop was right at his side.

"Me showee you allee samee lillee tick," he said, blandly, as he produced a pack of cards. "Comee by um fire, so you see, so be."

The eyes of the greaser lighted up as if by magic.

It so happened that he was a gambler himself, and he evidently thought there was a chance for him to win some money.

It made little or no difference to Hop who or what he was, so he started right in to work the three-card monte game.

Big Mike actually grinned when he saw what he was up to.

He understood that game as well as any one—at least, that is what he thought.

Hop threw out the three cards he had selected from the deck, and then he asked him to pick out the queen of diamonds, which was one of them.

Big Mike did so at once.

Then Hop did it over again.

"You no pickee out lis timee," he said, smiling at his victim.

"I bet you five dollar I do!" was the quick reply.

"Allee light."

Each put up five dollars, and then the greaser turned over the card he thought was the right one.

But he had made a mistake, for instead of being the queen of diamonds it was the ten of clubs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GAME THAT FAILED.

Big Mike uttered an exclamation of surprise when he found he had been deceived.

"You try again," he said, as Hop put the money in his pocket.

By this time Merril had given his partners the information he desired, and the three men came over by the fire to see what was going on.

Cheyenne Charlie also came over from the other camp.

"Three-card monte, hey?" said the scout, as he saw the cards. "How are yer makin' out, Hop?"

"Allee samee velly muchee fine, so be," answered the clever Chinaman, smiling blandly.

"You do da trick some more," said the greaser, pulling out the five-dollar counterfeit piece Hop had presented him with.

"Me no bettee fivee dollee; me bettee allee samee ten dollee," the Celestial answered, he not caring to simply win the counterfeit piece.

"All right," was the reply; "me bet ten."

Then the villain scowled at the scout, as though he thought he had no right to come there.

But Charlie returned the fierce look with interest.

It would have taken very little to start a fight between the two men, and if that had happened it would surely have gone bad with the treacherous greaser.

Hop held up the cards, so all hands might see them, and then cleverly let them fall on the ground.

Big Mike had been watching the queen closely this time, and as he knew how to perform the deceiving trick, he thought he would surely have the Chinaman this time.

He placed his hand on a card and exclaimed:

"That the queen; me bet ten dollar more."

"Allee light; me bettee you," was the quick reply.

Then the greaser hesitated about pulling out the money.

"Whattee mattee?" asked Hop. "You allee samee see um card. You 'fraid to bet, so be?"

"I no bet some more."

Evidently he thought Hop was too willing, so Big Mike put his money back in his pocket.

But he already had ten dollars up, so he turned over the card.

It was not the queen.

"Caramba!" he hissed, and once more he looked at Cheyenne Charlie and scowled.

"What's ther matter with yer, Greaser?" asked the scout. "I ain't doin' it."

The villain muttered something in his own language, which no doubt meant that he would like to kill somebody not far away, and then, as Hop took the money, he picked up the three cards.

Those looking on became more interested than before.

"Me do da trick," he said. "How much you bet?"

"Me bettee allee samee ten dollee," was the Chinaman's reply.

"All right."

Then Big Mike performed the trick rather skillfully and looked at Hop as though he considered that he did something that could not be beat.

But he was simply trying to beat a man at his own game, and Hop picked out the card immediately.

The Mexican uttered an exclamation of disgust.

No money had been put up this time, and when Hop spoke about it Big Mike shook his head and exclaimed:

"No pay. Chinee a fraud!"

"Allee light," was the reply. "Me allee samee muchee satisfied, Misler Gleaser."

A scowl was the only retort he got, and Hop surely was satisfied, since he had won some of the villain's money and had received a flask of whisky from him in the bargain.

Charlie went back to his quarters, and about an hour later our friends were all apparently asleep.

The three prospectors were still up, talking about what they meant to do when they sold their precious load, and Big Mike listened for a while and then took to his blanket.

His snoring a few minutes later told the three men that he was really asleep.

But they did not mean to close their eyes until after they knew they were safe from an attack.

That it would come at midnight they felt certain, for they all put faith in what Cheyenne Charlie had told them.

It was quite easy for them to remain awake, for, with the knowledge of what was to happen on their minds, sleep would be hard to court, indeed.

The hours passed on, and when Merrill looked at his watch, for about the twentieth time, and found that it lacked but a few minutes of twelve, he became very nervous.

He was lying down close to his companions, but the greaser guide lay several feet away, a boulder between them.

Merrill touched Scott and then Dennison.

Instantly they were on the alert.

The three raised their heads cautiously and looked over at Young Wild West's camp.

They were just in time to see the young deadshot creeping around behind a boulder.

This made them feel more easy, for they knew that the help they depended upon was sure.

They had barely dropped back into sleeping positions when the guide raised up on his elbow and looked cautiously toward them.

All three feigned sleep, trying to breathe regularly.

Big Mike was evidently satisfied, for the next minute

he crawled entirely behind the boulder and disappeared. Almost at the same moment Jim Dart arose and stepped softly over to the three.

"Come on!" he whispered. "It will be better for you to be with us now. Don't worry about your wagon. We'll soon fix the galoots when they show up."

Merril and his partners felt that it was proper to do as they were asked, so they crept softly to the other camp with Jim.

When they got there they found that both Wild and the scout had left it.

"They are watching for the thieves," Jim explained. "If you hear some shooting in a minute or two don't be surprised."

"I reckon ther greaser guide will wish he had never tackled this job afore he gits through with it," remarked Dennison.

"You can bet he will!" Dart answered.

The next minute there was some disturbance among the mules, and then they knew that the villains were at their work.

But just then the voice of Young Wild West was heard.

"Hands up, you scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "Your little game is spoiled!"

Crack—crack!

Two shots rang out in quick succession, and then there came the sounds of retreating footsteps.

"Whoopie! Whoopie! Wow! Wow!" rang out the voice of Cheyenne Charlie. "Run, you sneakin' coyotes, run!"

There was a brief interval of silence and then the clatter of hoofs sounded.

"They're off!" cried Jim, excitedly. "I reckon I'll try and get in a shot. It is moonlight."

He ran out of the confines of the camp, only to meet Wild and Charlie dragging along a prisoner.

"We've got one, Jim," said Wild. "Another lies dead among the rocks over there, and the other three got away. Big Mike was one of them. They had their horses so close by that it was no use. The greaser guide took the horse of the galoot Charlie shot, I reckon."

"Won't they come back again?" asked Merrill, anxiously.

"Not to-night, I reckon," was the reply. "If they do they are perfectly welcome, I assure you. Such a lot as they are won't amount to much. They are too cowardly for that."

"Well, I am glad it is no worse, anyhow. Just think of what would have happened if you had not come along this way!"

"Well, it is most likely you would have been cleaned out, all right," Wild admitted.

The prisoner, who was one of those who hang around mining camps and never are guilty of doing any work, was in a very dejected frame of mind as he was brought to a halt in the light of the lantern that Jim Dart held in his hand.

"What is your name?" Wild demanded, sternly, as he looked him over.

"Levi Stark," was the reply.

"Where do you hail from?"

"Lemon Creek is where I've been hangin' out ther last month."

Lemon Creek was the name of the mining camp the prospectors had left that morning, and when they came to look at the man closely they recognized him as one who had been hanging around the gambling saloons in that place.

"We know him," said Merril. "Now, just make him tell what he was up to, Mr. West."

"I reckon we know that already," our hero replied. "He was simply going to help rob you of your gold, that's all."

"Big Mike coaxed me inter it," he said, whiningly. "I ain't what yer kin call a bad man."

"Ther only way ter make yer good is ter cut short your wind, I reckon," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, smiling grimly.

Then the wretch began pleading for his life, for he thought the words of the scout implied that he would be hanged.

But Young Wild West had no such notion as that.

"Tie him, so he can't get away, boys," he said. "We'll see what is to be done with him in the morning!"

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT OF THE VILLAINS.

Though he was an unscrupulous scoundrel, and ready to commit any sort of crime, providing he thought it would pay him to do it, Big Mike was but a coward.

He did not have the nerve to stay and fight it out when he found his foul game had been nipped in the bud, and when one of the men who had come there to meet him, fired a shot as Young Wild West's voice rang out, he turned and fled for the first horse he could get hold of.

He heard the second shot, too, but he never turned to see who it was that fired it.

There had been five men, who had arranged to come to assist him to rob the three lucky men of their gold, but when he got safely away from the scene and had brought the horse he had mounted down to a walk he found that there were but three of them with him.

"Where are the others?" he asked, speaking in Spanish to one of the villains, who was a greaser, like himself.

"One got shot; the other was taken a prisoner," came the reply.

"Caramba! Sacre! This is bad work!" exclaimed the villainous guide.

"Very bad, Senor Mike," was the reply.

"If I'd thought we was goin' ter strike up ag'in any sich a game as this yer kin bet I wouldn't have left Lemon Creek," remarked the only American in the bunch. "What are yer goin' ter do about it, Mike? Yer ain't goin' ter let 'em go, are yer?"

"No, Senor Harlem," was the reply. "We must have the gold. And Young Wild West and his partners must never get out of the mountains alive. The fair senoritas must be ours, too. We will follow them, and when we

get them just right we will strike the blow that will win. We are the ones who will take the wagon-load of gold into Yuma and get the money."

"It sounds good ter hear yer tell it. But I reckon if we have ther same kind of luck as we've had to-night there won't be any of us left ter take ther wagon inter Yuma. One of your Mexican friends got his medicine, all right, an' they've got Stark a prisoner. It was done mighty quick, too, which shows that they must have been layin' fur us. How could they have found out that we was comin'?"

"I don't know, Senor Harlem," and the greaser guide shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "It is too bad that the boy called Young Wild West happened to come along. He is a hard one to fight. He is worse than any man I ever knew."

"But I reckon he ain't bulletproof, though. Just wait till I git a chance ter draw a bead on him! It will be goodby ter ther boy then! I kin shoot putty straight, Mike, an' I kin do it mighty quick, too."

"So-a me shoot verra straight," spoke up the other Mexican. "Me get-a square for shoot-a Juan!"

"That's right, Pablo. Juan was your pard, all right. He was a mighty good sort of a feller, too. You jest lay fur a chance ter git square. We didn't have no chance jest now, 'cause they was waitin' fur us, an' they took us by surprise. But I reckon our time will come, if Mike only works it right."

"I work it right," the treacherous guide answered. "I will ask da advice of you all before we fight. I lead you, but you have da say, too."

"That sounds like ther right kind of talk, Mike. You're ther kind of a leader ter have. It ain't your fault if Merril an' his pards fell in with somebody ter help 'em out. You told me that to-night. We all knewed that we had more than them three prospectors ter fool with; but we intended ter do ther work without wakin' any one up. Ther galoots was waitin' fur us ter show our hand an' ther minute we did they lit on us. There ain't no use in blamin' anybody fur it, 'cause that wouldn't be fair. They found it out some way, an' that's all there is about it. Now it's fur us ter git Stark away from 'em an' then git hold of that gold. As fur as ther gals goes, I ain't got nothin' ter say about 'em. But I'll say right here that I don't believe in botherin' with anything in petticoats. I've had too much of 'em in my time, an' I never seen any good come out of botherin' with 'em. They'll fool yer jest when yer don't expect it."

The four villains were riding slowly along in the moonlight now, not knowing just where they were heading for.

But as soon as Big Mike had returned to a frame of mind that would permit him to think with any degree of common sense he decided to move on to the place where he had told the men he was guiding that water could be found.

He had not lied about this, and as they had been compelled to leave in such a hurry, they were entirely without water or provisions.

They had a burro with them when they reached the place where they went in temporary camp before completing the final arrangements for the robbery, but the

villains who had followed the guide to the spot had not even thought of the animal when they made a bolt to escape.

As the leader thought of this he became decidedly uneasy.

"Senor Harlem," he said, after a rather lengthy pause, "you no afraid to go back and look for the burro?"

"I reckon I ain't, Mike," was the reply. "I'll jest strike out right away. You fellers wait here."

"All right, senor. You get da burro and we feel much obliged."

The guide was very polite to his ally just then.

But Harlem knew as well as he did that they might need the food and water before they got off the desert part of the mountains.

He was plucky and venturesome enough to take the risk, so without any more words he rode over the back trail.

Luck was with him, it seemed, for he had not gone more than a mile when he found the burro coming that way.

The load the animal carried was intact, too, for the villains had kept it ready to get away from the spot as soon as possible after they got control of the prospectors' outfit.

"I reckon that's what yer call mighty fine!" the villain exclaimed, as he caught the pack animal and started back again. "I never expected that it was goin' ter be as easy as this."

Much elated, Harlem rode back and joined his waiting companions.

To say that the latter were delighted would hardly be expressing it.

"You are verra brave, Senor Harlem," declared Big Mike, flatteringly.

"No," was the reply. "There wasn't anything brave about that. Ther blamed old burro was comin' this way—follerin' our trail, I reckon. It was mighty easy."

"But you did not stop about going, senor; that makes you a brave man."

"Maybe it does, an' maybe it don't. But it don't make no difference, anyhow. I reckon I'll do my part, all right. Now let's git along an' find that place where ther water is. It are mighty sure that Young Wild West will undertake ter pilot them three galoots ter Yuma now, fur ther chances is that they're bound up that way themselves. We ought ter be able ter rig up some kind of a trap fur 'em. I'll do some thinkin' between now an' mornin, an' maybe I kin hit on some plan. It ain't likely that they'll do any more ter Levi Stark than ter hold him a prisoner, an' when ther time comes we'll git him away from 'em easy enough."

Harlem had changed wonderfully in his way of thinking since he had found the loaded burro.

And when he talked in such a light-hearted way the Mexicans felt a great deal better.

But they were all breathing vengeance against Young Wild West and his companions on account of the death of the other greaser.

They pushed on, keeping up a good gait, the moon lighting the way for them, and it was not more than a

couple of hours before sunrise when they reached the water.

The trail ran through a big bed of cacti, and both horses and men were severely pricked by the sharp bayonets that threw themselves out in every direction from the plants.

"If it was daylight we would not have this trouble, senor," Big Mike explained to Harlem. "Since the moon is now behind that ridge over there we have not light enough to pick our way. The daylight is the proper time to ride through the cactus groves. Then you can tell which way to go to escape them."

It was just then that they got through the grove and came to the water.

The villainous American breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm mighty glad we're here," he exclaimed.

But he was not alone in this feeling.

"This is good water," said Big Mike, pointing to the stream which trickled down the steep descent. "It is not what you call brackish, like that we sometimes find in the waterholes."

Harlem soon became satisfied that what the greaser said about the water was right.

They all took a good drink, and then the horses and burros were allowed to help themselves.

Then, tired out and stinging from the pricks they had received from the bayonets of the cactus, the villains prepared to turn in and sleep.

"Let them come now!" exclaimed Big Mike, as he prepared to go to sleep. "They won't get here with the wagon much before noon, unless they start pretty soon. We'll be here waiting for them, Senor Harlem."

"That's right, Mike," was the reply.

Ten minutes later nothing could be heard but the regular breathing of the four men as they slept, for the horses had become silent, too, and the solitude would have been almost maddening to a person could he have been placed there all of a sudden.

Daylight came and the villains slept on.

It must have been as late as ten in the morning when one of the Mexicans awoke and found the sun shining down upon him.

He quickly roused the others, and then they set about to get their breakfast and make preparations for the arrival of our friends.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER IS GIVEN HIS LIBERTY.

When morning came Young Wild West was up and stirring.

Cheyenne Charlie and Merril had stood the last two hours of the watch, but as the sun was rising they decided not to look for any more sleep just then.

On the whole, it had been a pretty exciting night for the three prospectors, and they were very glad when it was daylight, for they then felt that they would be far safer.

The cook got busy getting the breakfast ready, and they all ate together.

By this time Wild had decided upon what he meant to do with the prisoner.

He decided to let him go, and when Cheyenne Charlie heard him say so, after they had finished the morning meal, he looked surprised.

The scout never believed in giving a villain who was dead against them any show.

"That's all right, Charlie," said our hero. "Maybe you think the galoot should not be allowed to go. But what are we going to do with him? We can't hang him for what he has done, since we are not a judge and jury. And if we keep him a prisoner it will be a source of trouble to us all the time. We'll let him take the trail of his friends, and when he gets to them he can tell them that we are coming. That will be about all, I reckon."

"We had better make him bury the body of the man who got his medicine last night before he goes," spoke up Jim Dart.

"That's right," our hero answered. "He will be glad enough to do that, considering that he is to be allowed his freedom, I think."

"I'll do anything you say!" exclaimed the prisoner, who could not help hearing everything that was said. "I won't never lift a finger ag'in any of yer again, either."

"Not until you get back with your friends and find a good chance to do it," retorted Wild. "I know you pretty well, I think. I have met so many just like you that I can tell your feelings when I look at you."

"You're makin' a mistake in me, then," persisted the man. "I've had all I want ter in this game. It won't make no difference what ther rest wants ter do, when I find 'em I'm goin' ter try an' persuade 'em that ther best thing fur 'em ter do is ter let you alone. I'll come putty nigh doin' it, too, though I might have a little trouble with Big Mike. He's a putty bad man ter handle, he is."

"All right. You can do just as you like about it. I don't want you to make any promises. When you find the greaser guide and the rest just tell them that we are coming. They will know what to do then. You can bet that when we shoot we will bring down a man every time, so if they want to keep on trying for the gold that is in that old prairie schooner they will have to take what comes. I reckon you can have your breakfast now. Hop, just cut him loose."

The prisoner was much relieved when the Chinaman severed the ropes that bound him.

He got upon his feet, stretched himself and then nodded with satisfaction.

"Maybe you'll find that I ain't so bad as I look," he remarked, as he noticed that the girls were looking at him with apparent disgust. "One thing about me is that I ain't never seen a woman harmed, not when I had anything ter say about it. I'll tell yer right now that Big Mike has got some idea of catchin' you gals. If he does happen ter do it yer kin bet that I'll see ter it that yer ain't hurt none. An' I'll let yer git away, too."

Wild began to think that the man was sincere when he heard him talk that way.

"All right, Stark," said he. "If you make up your mind that you're going to be a better man, and stick to it, you will be all the better off. In that case you had

better strike out for the mining camp, instead of following up the gang of villains."

"I kin do yer more good by jinin' 'em, I reckon. So I'll go on, if I kin git a horse ter ride. If I can't I might as well make up my mind ter put in a hard time of it with ther alkali dust. It'll only serve me right if I do, though."

"There must be a horse around here somewhere. The villains might have taken it with them, however."

"We each had a putty good horse an' a burro, too, which was loaded with water an' grub."

"I'll go an' see if I kin find 'em, 'cause I know ther galoots didn't have no burro with 'em when they lit out last night," Cheyenne Charlie observed.

He walked off among the rocks, while the released prisoner gladly accepted the coffee and food Wing gave him.

In about ten minutes the scout came back, leading a horse.

"I found ther nag," he said. "But ther burro must have gone on, 'cordin' to ther trail I seen. This nag would have gone on, too, only ther bridle rein, which was hangin' down over his head, got caught on a sharp p'int of rock an' held him there. I reckon it was a lucky thing fur you that he got caught, you robber galoot, you!"

"I'm mighty glad ther nag did git ketched," was the reply. "It ain't mine, but that makes no difference. This horse is ther one ther greaser what got shot rode. He won't have no use fur him any more, 'cause I'm goin' ter bury him as soon as I git done eatin'."

The man talked as though he was all right, and our friends could not help but think that possibly he meant to do right in the future.

When he had finished his breakfast Stark asked for a shovel, which was promptly given him by Hop.

Then he went and found the body of the Mexican, and, after digging out a shallow grave in the sand, he buried it.

He came back with the shovel and declared that he was "much obliged," and then added:

"Now I'll go an' find ther gang an' yer kin bet that I'll advise 'em ter let you folks alone. They don't stand no more show with yer than they would have with a band of 'Pache Injuns!"

Wild gave him his weapons, for he felt that if the man really meant to stick to what he said he might need them to protect himself against the greaser guide.

If he was simply trying to deceive them it would only make one more against them, and that was not so much, as far as our hero and his partners thought.

"I'm mighty glad ter git off as easy as this, Young Wild West," Stark said, as he was ready to take the trail of his companions. "Jest wait till I git a chance ter talk to yer ag'in. You'll find out that I'm a man of my word, even if I have been a mighty bad galoot! Good-bye!"

Off he rode, taking the trail that led over the burning sands.

In a few minutes he was entirely out of sight, and then our friends made ready to follow him.

They were heading for Yuma, which was about eighty miles away by the route they must take, and, though they had never passed that way before, our hero was quite sure that they could reach there in due time.

If the trail had led over a level plain or where there was plenty of timber and water, they could make better time.

However, they knew that as soon as they got the other side of the peak they could see in the distance they would strike vegetation, for as the mouth of the Colorado River was neared the land became fertile and the foliage of the semi-tropics would be much in evidence.

It was not long before the party was proceeding on its way, the three miners riding along in the wagon, since they had brought no horses with them.

The six mules were quite capable of pulling the old prairie schooner over the rough trail, though it was rather slow work, for mules, as a rule, do not take much to fast traveling.

Though the sun was not very high, the heat from it was fierce, and if they had not all been provided with sombreros they might have suffered severely.

"So the greaser guide said there was water over there, did he?" remarked Wild, as he rode up close to Merrill, who was driving the mules.

"Yes," was the reply; "that is what he said."

"Well, I hope he told the truth, for we haven't any more than we want in the line of water. However, it is quite likely that if we do find it, the villains will be there for the purpose of keeping us from getting to it."

"That is what I have been worrying about, Young Wild West."

"Well, don't do any more worrying, then. Nothing ever comes of worrying—nothing good, I mean. Just take it easy. There are only five, counting the one we let go a little while ago, and if he meant what he said we will only have four to contend with. I reckon we can take care of them all right."

About three hours after the start was made they came in sight of the grove of cacti.

Some of the plants that seemed to flourish so on the arid tract reared themselves to a height of thirty or forty feet, and to one not accustomed to that region it would have appeared as though they were approaching a forest of trees.

A hunter or scout generally expects to find water where there is timber and other vegetation, but to find water in a cactus region is out of the question.

Still lives have been saved by the melon cactus, which is a species that bears a fruit that is not unlike a melon in shape. The juice of this fruit, though not pleasant to the taste, answers, in a measure, for water, and with the renewed strength he receives from it the traveler has often managed to get far enough to find water, and thus save his life.

Young Wild West knew that it was nothing more than a cactus growth that they were approaching, and this made him think that there could be no water close to it.

But he did not let the prospectors know his thoughts, as he did not wish to discourage them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SMOKE SIGNAL.

There was no difficulty in following the trail of the villains, for it was very plain, but when they finally

reached the cactus grove our friends picked out a route that was easier to follow.

They soon found that Stark had done this, too, so once they got upon his trail they kept right ahead.

"I reckon that galoot has got there an hour ago," said Cheyenne Charlie. "We never once seen a sight of him after he left."

"Well, he could keep right on at a lope, with that tough broncho he had," our hero answered. "We have been coming along at a rather slow pace, on account of the mule wagon. But we will get there all right, even if it does take a little longer."

It was nearly noon when they suddenly came in sight of a thin column of smoke rising from a cleft in the rocks half a mile distant.

Young Wild West gave a nod of satisfaction.

"I reckon we are not far away from the villains now," he remarked. "But we won't head straight for that smoke, for that is just about what they want us to do."

But when he looked around and saw more smoke rising from behind a cliff something like a quarter of a mile to the right of the other, he called a halt.

"Boys," said he, addressing his two partners, "that looks like a signal, come to think of it."

"I reckon you're right, Wild," Charlie answered, nodding his head. "Some one has started that smoke jester 'tract ther 'tention of somebody else. It's a sort of Injun signal, I reckon. But I don't believe there's any Injuns around here."

"No, there are no redskins very close by, of that I feel sure. I'll tell you who I think started that smoke."

"Who?" the scout and Jim asked the question, as though in one voice.

"Stark."

"Yer think so, Wild?" queried Charlie, while Jim nodded, as though he thought it might be.

"Yes, I think so. He has set the smoke rising to keep us from going into a trap, possibly. There is one thing certain, that smoke over to the right looks more like a campfire. There is not enough fire under that over there to boil a coffee kettle. It is dying down now, too, which shows that only the lightest kind of wood was used to make the fire. Well, we'll head for that signal, that's all. We'll take the chances. We can't go wrong, I think, by doing this."

"But we'll be ready to shoot in case it becomes necessary," spoke up Arietta.

"Of course," our hero answered. "Just keep your eyes peeled, boys."

Having decided what to do, Wild at once started ahead.

All were quite willing to follow, for they placed great dependence upon the judgment of the dashing young deadshot.

Before they were half way to the spot the smoke had died out entirely.

But they kept right on, their rifles ready to shoot at an instant's notice.

In a few minutes they came in sight of a strip of sparse grass, they having left the cactus beds behind now.

"That looks putty good, I reckon," said Charlie, as he pointed to the grass. "We're gittin' closer to ther water all ther time, boys."

The next minute they rounded a turn and saw more grass.

It was more luxuriant than the other, too, and this only encouraged them all the more.

At length they came in sight of the smouldering fire that had been lighted as a signal.

There was no one there, but very close to it they beheld a stream of water trickling from the rocks above and losing itself in the white, glistening sand.

Young Wild West gave a nod of satisfaction.

"I reckon it's all right," he said. "But don't forget to keep a watch. We may have been led into a trap, after all, though it don't look much like it."

They came to a halt near the ashes of the fire, and then, after taking a good look around, our hero decided that it was safe to tackle the water.

The stream was but a tiny one, and was evidently a branch from the one the greaser guide and his companions had located their camp by.

But it afforded them all they wanted, and soon all hands had taken a drink.

Then the tired animals were given a chance at it, and it is safe to say that they appreciated it as much as their human companions.

The grass, too, proved to be a source of joy to them, and while Charlie and the two Chinamen went in search of something to feed the smouldering fire with Wild and the rest stood on watch for danger.

But no one showed themselves.

Whoever it was that started the little fire must have carried the fuel from a ravine a short distance away, for there was nothing in the way of wood any nearer.

"Now, then," said Wild, when he saw the cook getting ready to prepare the noonday meal, "I reckon I'll take a walk over that way and see what is there. The gang we are looking for is camped there, and I'll bet on it!"

"Be careful, Wild," advised Arietta. "Don't let the villains catch you napping. This all may be only a trick, after all."

"Well, if it is a trick they let us reach a mighty good spot to take care of ourselves in. Just see the rocks we've got to drop behind and do our shooting from! No, Et, it isn't a trick. It was Stark who made the fire, just to draw us away from the gang. I reckon that fellow meant what he said."

"Well, if he did he is one out of a thousand," the girl answered. "As he remarked at the camp, he is not as bad as he looks to be."

"I wonder where ther galoot is now?" the scout observed.

"Oh, the chances are that he came here on the sly and did this," our hero answered. "But never mind. We will go on with the dinner. The quicker we get away the better, I think. Once we get ahead of the scoundrels they will have a hard time in surprising us."

"Unless they work around and get ahead of us," added Jim.

"That's right, Jim. They may do that. We can't tell just how the country is a little further on. It may be good traveling all around."

Anna turned to and gave the cook some assistance by

making up some biscuits, which were baked in the pot-oven they carried with them.

The scout's wife was a very good hand at this, and she could do as well with the crude affair, such as the cowboys take with them when they go out a long way from the ranch for the fall roundup, as most housewives could with a first-class cook stove or range.

Bacon and eggs, biscuits, roasted potatoes and coffee was the bill of fare for dinner that way, and it was not such a bad meal, either; certainly one would hardly expect to get half as good in a wild section of the country, like that was.

Wild and his partners were on their feet the most of the time they were eating, however.

They did not know how soon they might be attacked by the villainous gang.

It was just as they had finished and Wing and Hop were hastening to clear up the remains of the meal, when a rifle shot sounded and a bullet whizzed past the head of Cheyenne Charlie and flattened against a rock.

Instantly our hero's eyes were turned in the direction the shot came from.

He could see the slight smoke curling upward, but could not see the person who fired.

However, he stepped behind a rock, the same as the rest did, and, keeping a good watch on the spot, which was about two hundred yards distant, waited.

In less than a minute he noticed a bush move near the identical spot the shot had been fired from.

His rifle was at his shoulder in a twinkling, and, taking a quick aim, he pressed the trigger.

Crang!

The report rang out with startling distinctness, and at the same moment the form of a man raised above the bush and then fell back and disappeared.

"That was a greaser, Wild," said Charlie, with a grim smile on his face. "I could tell by his hat. One more less ter fight."

"I reckon they'll soon find out that we can more than hold our own at this kind of fighting," Wild answered. "The trouble with them is that they can't shoot straight."

No one felt the least bit of remorse over the shot our hero had fired.

The greaser guide and his men wanted their lives, and it was right and proper that they should shoot in self-defense.

Nothing more was seen of the villains, so our hero took the risk of stepping out from behind the rock.

This did not draw a shot, as he thought it might do, so he told the Chinamen to fill the water kegs with fresh water and get ready to start.

"I'll just go over there and see what they are up to," he added. "I changed my mind once, but this time I'll stick to it."

No one tried to persuade him not to go, for they all felt that he was more than able to take care of himself.

The boy went with no little caution, however, for he did not mean to let the villains get a shot at him at close quarters.

In less than three minutes he was right at the very spot where the Mexican had dropped when he fired a shot at the moving bush.

It was at the top of a little hill, and, peering over it, he saw two men carrying the body of a man along a ledge something like three hundred yards away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REFORMATION OF STARK.

Levi Stark lost no time in getting to the spot where he knew his comrades must be waiting.

The man was eager to get there, but it was more for the purpose of doing a good turn for Young Wild West and his friends than anything else.

Stark meant to stick to what he had told our hero, for it had struck him very forcibly that they had very little show to get hold of the prospectors' gold now.

And then the way Young Wild West had used him set him to thinking.

"I ain't never amounted ter anything, so it's about time I took a turn fur ther better, if I'm ever goin' ter," was the inward conclusion he came to when he declared that he was going to try and make his companions let our friends alone.

The further he went over the dusty trail the more he became impressed with the idea of reforming.

And when he finally found Big Mike and the three who were waiting with him he had settled upon a plan of action.

He was going to deceive them, and aid Young Wild West.

As might be supposed, the villains were not a little surprised when they saw Stark come riding out of the cactus bed.

They had not expected that Young Wild West would let him go free.

"Hello, Levi, old feller!" cried Harlem, showing the pleasure he felt at meeting with one of his own race.

"Hello!" was the reply. "How are yer all gittin' along, anyhow?"

"Putty good. But how did yer git away from Young Wild West an' his gang?"

"Oh, they untied me this mornin' ter give me my breakfast, an' as soon as I had finished I lit out around among ther rocks. They didn't try ter foller me, as I heard Young Wild West call out that they would only have a lot of bother if they kept me till they got ter Yuma. So I run on, an' all of a sudden I found Juan's horse, with his bridle caught on a sharp-p'inted rock. I jest let out a whoop of delight when I got hold of ther horse, boys."

"The senor was very lucky," spoke up Big Mike. "We are verra glad he got here."

They all shook hands with the newcomer, who played his part very well for one of his sort.

But though he was very friendly with the villains, never once did he change in his determination to assist our friends and prevent them from being injured by the greaser guide.

He remained with them until it was near dinner time, and then he took his rifle and remarked that he was going

over to a hill a quarter of a mile away to try and find something in the line of game.

"I might be able ter see 'em, if they're comin' ther other side of ther cactus," he added.

Big Mike nodded his approval.

"You might see Young Wild West and his friends, but you no see no game," he said. "It too soon for game; we strike plenty to-morrow."

Stark hurried away.

He soon reached the point he was aiming for, and then he climbed a high rock that commanded a view of the desert the other side of the cactus bed.

Much to his satisfaction, he saw a cloud of dust over five miles away.

He then felt sure that our friends were coming, and, knowing that Big Mike and the rest could not see them from where they were, down in the hollow, he determined to try and let them know that he was going to keep his word.

"Young Wild West an' his pards will see ther smoke from ther fire back there, an' they'll know it's ther campfire of ther galoots what's layin' fur 'em," he muttered. "Now, if I was ter send up a smoke signal maybe they'd understand that it meant fur 'em ter head fur it. I'll try it, if I lose by it."

He gathered up an armful of dry grass and twigs and then went down the hill to the spot where the water trickled down the rocks.

This was the first that he knew there was water there, and when he saw it he made up his mind that it was just the spot to draw Young Wild West to, if it could be done, as he would want the water, above all other things.

Stark sat down and waited for the party to get nearly through the growth of cactus.

He could judge pretty well how long it would take them and, regardless of the fact that he was staying away from the camp a rather long time, he waited patiently.

At length he decided that it was time for him to act, and then he lighted the small heap of grass and fagots he had arranged.

Then he climbed the hill and made his way back to the camp.

"Well, I didn't hear yer shoot, so I reckon yer didn't have no luck," Harlem observed.

"I didn't see a thing, pard," the man replied. "That is, I didn't see nothing that was in ther line of game. I did see a cloud of dust over there, ther other side of ther cactus, though. I reckon Young Wild West is comin', all right."

"Good!" exclaimed Big Mike, jumping to his feet. "If they come here we will soon fix them, as you Americans say. The gold must be ours, and the senoritas, too!"

"They will come here, all right," Stark answered, shaking his head, as though he feared the time when they showed up. "Young Wild West told me to tell you, Mike, that he was coming straight for you, and then when him an' his pards started in ter shoot they was goin' ter drop a man at every clip. We've got ter look out, fur that there boy kin shoot like chain lightnin', I tell yer!"

"He shoot-a poor Juan," spoke up the greaser called Pablo. "Me make a-square plenty quick."

"Look out he don't see yer when you're goin' ter do it,

then," said Stark. "If he sees you ther same time you see him you'll go ter jine your friend, which I buried this mornin'."

"You bury-a poor Juan?" the other Mexican spoke up, looking at him with admiration.

"Yes, Young Wild West made me do it afore I run away from 'em."

This seemed to please all three of the greasers, for it was no doubt a little consoling to them to know that their companion's remains had not been left above ground.

Big Mike began to grow uneasy all of a sudden.

It was evident that he was not anxious to get into a fight with our friends—or not so much that way as he had been making out.

"We hide behind da rocks," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Den we shoot before they know."

Stark nodded, though he did not exactly like it, as it might be that those he had promised to befriend might be shot down before they had a chance to return the shots.

But it quickly struck him that Young Wild West and his partners could hardly be that kind of people.

They would be expecting an ambush.

And then again they would surely see the smoke from the fire he had made near the little stream of water.

It was impossible to see this smoke from the place the villains had selected to wait for the arrival of those they meant to attack and slay, so Stark felt secure on that part.

After they had waited for some time and the party did not show up, one of the Mexicans volunteered to climb the hill and have a look around.

"Go ahead," said Harlem, encouragingly; "I'll go along. An' if we git a chance at Young Wild West we'll let him have it. Ther quicker he goes under ther better it will be."

"I'll go along, too," spoke up Stark, who meant to prevent anything happening to those he had promised to protect, if he possibly could.

Big Mike nodded his approval.

"Pablo and me stay here," he said. "You shoot if you see Young Wild West. But make sure."

"We'll make sure, all right," Harlem answered. "Come on, boys."

The Mexican led the way.

He was very anxious to be revenged for the death of his friend, which had occurred the night before.

When Stark saw them making for the very hill he had climbed a short time before he grew a trifle nervous.

But before they reached it he called their attention to another point that was quite high, and he succeeded in getting them to go to it.

When they reached the top of the hill, which had a clump of bushes here and there, they saw the camp of our friends a short distance away.

The Mexican, without speaking a word, placed his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

And it was answered, as the reader knows.

The greaser caused the bush to move, and that sealed his fate.

He leaped high in the air and came rolling down the hill as the bullet hit him.

Harlem uttered a cry of fear and started to run, but Stark called him back.

"We will carry him to the camp," he said. "Maybe he ain't dead."

They picked the man up and started away with him, neither turning to look back.

But by the time they reached Big Mike and Pablo the wretch had expired.

The greaser guide shook his head.

"Verra bad work!" he said. "But we won't give up, senors. We will ride on and get ahead of them. In some place that they must pass through we will set a trap, and they shall not escape!"

CHAPTER IX.

STARK LEAVES THE VILLAINS.

Wild quickly saw that one of the men was Levi Stark.

He could have shot the pair of them easily, if he had so desired, but he was not going to do anything like that.

Young Wild West only fired to kill when some one was doing the same to him, or others who were in need of protection.

"I wonder if it really was Stark who made that fire?" he thought. "There is no other person around here who would do a thing to aid us, I am sure. But he seems to be right in with the gang now, for he is assisting in carrying away the man I shot. But it must be that he did it. Probably he is deceiving his companions by helping us. Well, I'll let them go, anyhow. There are only four left, counting Stark."

He watched the two men as they passed over the ledge, and when they got where it was safer walking Stark turned and looked that way.

Acting on an impulse, our hero stood up and waved his hat.

Then, much to his satisfaction, the man gave an answering wave of the hand.

"That man is all right," muttered the boy. "He is one out of a thousand. We must be mighty careful and not hit him, if there is any more shooting to be done."

Turning back, he soon came to his waiting companions.

The pack horses were about ready, so after he had related what he had seen they started off.

"I'm glad ter hear that Stark has stuck ter what he said, Wild," said the scout. "I never had no idea that he meant one word of it. Yer can't always tell about sich men as that. Sometimes yer will strike one that's a little different from ther rest. An' sich a bad-lookin' galoot as he is, too!"

"Looks are sometimes very deceivin', Charlie," spoke up Merril. "That's what we thought about the Greaser Guide, as he is nicknamed. He was a pretty ugly looking customer, we thought, when he was recommended to us;

but we allowed that he might be all right, in spite of that."

"Well, he wasn't all right, was he?"

"Far from it."

"He will be all right afore we git through with him, though."

There was a grim smile on the tanned face of the scout as he said this, and they all knew what he referred to.

"Now, boys, we must keep on the watch," said Wild, as they rode along. "The galoots will most likely follow us, and, though we have a friend with them, there is no telling but that they might get in a shot or two that will do some damage. As far as I have seen, they are pretty bad at shooting. But that don't say that they will miss every time they fire."

"Ther galoot what fired ther last shot won't fire no more, anyhow," the scout observed.

"He velly muchee dead, so be," said Hop, smiling in his bland way.

"You had better look out if you happen to fall in the hands of Big Mike. He will be apt to git square with you for the three-card business," remarked Merril, with a smile.

"Me no 'flaid of um gleaser," was the quick reply. "Me allee samee velly muchee smartee Chinee."

"I guess that's about right."

"Me gottee uncle in China whattee velly muchee smartee, and me allee samee likee my uncle."

"Never mind about that uncle of yourn!" interrupted the scout. "I don't believe yer ever had sich a thing as an uncle. Shet up!"

"Allee light, Misler Charlie; me allee samee shuttee uppee, so be. Me likee chuckee dice with you for um dollee, allee samee."

"Well, yer can't chuck no dice with me. You're too much of a cheat fur honest folks ter deal with."

Hop grinned.

He knew that the scout could not be induced to go into any kind of a gambling game with him, because he had been badly bitten several times.

The party pushed on up the long hill, over the trail that wound around it, and in about half an hour they were going down into a valley that was remarkably fertile, contrasting greatly with the desert they had passed over that morning.

"I reckon we'll soon be able ter strike somethin' in ther line of fresh meat," remarked Charlie, as he looked at the thick timber that could be seen a few miles ahead of them. "A nice, fat cinnamon bear wouldn't be bad ter strike about now."

No one offered to contradict him on this, for they all were a little partial to bear steaks, especially when the bear they were cut from was young and comparatively tender.

No bear meat is tender, for it is not the nature of it to be so.

As they were riding down into the valley they suddenly saw a cloud of dust half a mile ahead of them.

"There they go!" exclaimed Young Wild West, rising in his stirrups and shading his eyes with his hand. "They have got ahead of us. They can get along faster with their burro than we can with the mule wagon. I reckon

they must be on the lookout for an ambush now. But they can't catch us that way for a while, anyhow. There is no place for them to lay in hidin'."

Sure enough, they all made out the forms of the men as they rode along toward the timber.

One of them was gradually dropping behind, and when they saw him come to a halt and proceed to fix his saddle it was easy to guess that it was Levi Stark.

"He wants to drop back and leave them, I reckon," said Jim. "Most likely he has got enough of their company. Suppose we ride up and overtake him, Wild?"

"Just what I was thinking of," was the reply. "Come on!"

Away went the two, their horses at a dead gallop.

Instead of trying to get away from them, Stark—for it was surely he—hurriedly mounted his broncho and came toward them, bending low in the saddle, as though he expected to be shot at by the men he was leaving.

The three ahead saw him just then, and they also saw our hero and Jim Dart.

Then they got a lively move on them, letting go the burro in their effort to get to cover.

Wild held his rifle ready to shoot, in case they fired at Stark, but this they did not do, so they simply rode on until they met him.

"Well, Young Wild West, I thought I'd better quit 'em fur good," said the man, as he pulled in his steed and came to a halt. "I told yer I was goin' ter do all I could ter help yer, an' I've done it. I'm a different man from what I was when yer ketched me last night."

"Good for you, Stark!" our hero answered, putting out his hand. "Shake on that!"

"I'm mighty glad ter shake with yer."

Then he gripped the boy's hand, after which he turned and shook with Jim.

"You're all right, Stark," said Wild. "Come on with us. I reckon you've made a mighty good change. That was a clever thing you did when you sent up that smoke signal."

"I was a little afraid it wouldn't work," Stark answered. "I'm might glad it did, 'cause I made up my mind that I wasn't goin' ter let 'em ketch yer nappin', not if I got in trouble with 'em fur doin' it!"

"It worked fine, Stark. I knew right away who had started the smoke, as soon as I saw the other smoke, anyhow."

They rode back slowly and met the rest coming.

Stark was given a hearty welcome by all hands, including the girls, and the chances are that he never felt so important in his whole life as he did just then.

"The galoots will probably wait for us in the timber," said Wild. "Well, I reckon they'll have to be pretty sharp if they want to catch us napping."

The cloud of dust ahead of them soon disappeared, showing that the villains had placed a hill between them and our friends.

They had to come back to get their burro, however, after they saw that they were not going to be pursued, for they probably felt that they needed the provisions the animal carried.

At length the timber was only a mile ahead, and then our friends grew a little cautious.

"I reckon they won't fire no more than one shot afore we git a line on 'em," said Cheyenne Charlie, who was riding ahead with Wild.

"Well, keep an eye ahead, that's all," was the reply.

But nothing happened, and soon they were at the edge of the rich growth of wood and other vegetation.

The trail was plain, so that meant that the three villains had gone on ahead.

So long as they could see that the hoofprints led in the one way Wild and his partners knew there was hardly any danger of an ambuscade, unless the greaser guide had doubled.

But they were so close behind them that they hardly had time to do this, and it was quite plausible that they would find a good place to make a stand before they put up a fight.

They knew before this what kind of shots our hero and his partners were.

On they went, and in about half an hour they came to the other side of the timber strip.

An undulating plain lay ahead of them, with patches of timber scattered over it, while something like fifteen miles beyond was an unbroken ridge, also plentifully supplied with vegetation of the semi-tropics.

"I reckon we'll strike somethin' in ther line of livin' bein's afore long," observed the scout. "This begins ter show up putty well, Wild."

"That's right, Charlie," was the reply. "Hello! I see a shanty now! Take a look between those two timber patches. See that house right below that steep bank away over there? I know it is a house, because I can see the smoke coming from a chimney."

CHAPTER X.

MONTE, THE VILLAINOUS INNKEEPER.

Big Mike and his two remaining followers had no idea of stopping very soon after they saw that Stark had quit them.

They had not suspected that he would do anything like this, since he had managed to deceive them right along.

The body of the Mexican had been buried immediately after it was brought to camp, and then it was that the guide began to realize that they had better go a little bit slow until the proper time to finish the job came.

The villain knew the way very well, and when he figured that they ought to reach a small ranch that was kept by a friend he knew to be of the same stamp as he, by noon, he decided that they would push right ahead and endeavor to get there before they tried any more shots at Young Wild West's party.

When Stark left them in such a sudden way they were only the more anxious to get to the little ranch, which really was nothing more than a sort of wayside inn.

"Come on," said Big Mike, when they had recovered the burro they had left in order to get out of the way of the bullets they expected to come. "We will get to Monte's ranch. Then we will be safe."

"Why, how fur is it?" asked Harlem, who was sur-

prised to hear him talk as though they were near to a ranch.

The fact was that Big Mike had not yet told what had been creeping through his mind, and he smiled at the question of his American ally.

"There is a little ranch not more than thirty miles from here," he said, as they rode on through the woods they had now struck. "It is kept by an old friend of mine, and is on the route that is called the Gila Trail. It is the only place within twenty miles of Gila. But there is a branch in the trail a couple of miles north of it, which goes on to Yuma. Monte will be glad to see me, and he will surely help us catch Young Wild West, especially when we tell him that he can have a share of the gold."

"Well, that's what I calls putty good!" exclaimed Harlem. "I didn't have no idea that we was anywhere near a ranch, or anything else like it. Wow! I'm glad, 'cause we'll be able ter git wine an' sich like."

"Wine and whisky, too, Senor Harlem," declared the greaser guide.

Pablo was delighted, too.

"We hurry along and we get-a dere by noon," he said. Big Mike nodded.

"Surely by noon," he answered.

The traveling was a little more pleasant after they left the desert behind them, and as the three villains came in sight of the little ranch house, which was nothing more than a small structure, with a thatched roof, they gave vent to exclamations of joy.

The shanty, as it might properly be called, stood right against the bend in the road they had come upon a short time before, and, though it was very humble in appearance, it belonged to one of the worst villains in that part of the country.

The road was used quite a little by travelers on their way to the three or four little towns that lay to the west, and it was only natural that they should hail it as a place to rest and refresh themselves.

But now and then a traveler stopped there who was never heard of afterward, for the crafty Mexican who owned the place had a deep cellar dug under the shanty, and when he found that a guest had considerable money with him, he, with the assistance of his wife and son, would contrive to drop the unsuspecting man through a trap into the cellar.

Then murder was done and the body buried.

Big Mike knew something about this, as he had often assisted Monte in his murderous work, and had profited by it.

He had not been there in over six months, because the last case he was implicated in made him fear that suspicion would be directed to the lonely, thatched shanty at the bend in the trail; and if Monte should be caught and made to confess, it would be no place for him around that part of the country.

The three villains rode up to the door of the shanty and were met by no less a person than the proprietor of the murderous abode himself.

"Hello, old friend, Monte!" called out the guide, as he dismounted.

At first he was not recognized, for Big Mike had changed some since he had been at the mining camp back

beyond the desert. But Monte soon made out who he was, and then he gave him a glad welcome.

The two conversed in Spanish, Pablo putting in a few words now and then, until Harlem became tired of it.

"Let's have somethin' ter drink," he said, interrupting them. "I'm about as dry as a fish."

Then they all went inside, and their horses were put away by the innkeeper's rascally son, a young Mexican hardly of age.

"Did yer tell him what was up, Mike?" Harlem asked, as some wine was put on the table for them.

"Yes, señor," was the reply. "Señor Monte will help us out. Young Wild West will never get further than this house alive!"

"Good! That's ther kind of talk I like ter hear!"

"And Señor Stark must die for his treachery, went on the Mexican, his brow darkening.

"Sartin. Yer don't s'pose F'd stick up fur ther galoot, do yer?"

"You should not, Señor Harlem."

"Well, I reckon not. Jest see how he turned ag'in us! I'll bet he only come an' j'ined us jest ter be of some help ter Young Wild West. Don't you worry. Jest let me git a chance. I'll make short work of Levi Stark—mighty short work, Mike!"

The treacherous guide looked pleased at this, while the little, black eyes of Monte twinkled.

The innkeeper could speak and understand English fairly well, and as he had heard the gist of the whole thing he was eager to help out his old friend.

But the gold that was in the prairie schooner was what interested him the most.

The unscrupulous scoundrel cared not what he did, so long as he obtained money.

It mattered nothing to him if two or three people were killed.

The fact that he had remained undiscovered in the crimes he had committed for so many months made him far bolder than he would otherwise have been.

"They will stop here when they come along," he said to Big Mike, in Spanish. "When they come you must not be seen. I will tell them that three men stopped here, and after a little refreshment went on again. It will be very easy."

The old villain chuckled and rubbed his scrawny hands. An hour passed.

The three men who were so anxious to take the life of Young Wild West had eaten a substantial dinner and were sitting in the rear room of the shanty, smoking cigarettes and sipping wine and whisky alternately.

Miguel, the son of the innkeeper, was out watching for our friends to come along, so he might report, and thus preparations could be made to receive them.

"It's about time they showed up, I reckon," remarked Harlem, growing a trifle uneasy.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the young Mexican came in hurriedly.

"They are coming, señors!" he exclaimed. "They have halted about two hundred yards the other side of the bend."

"Is that so?" Big Mike queried, as he threw away his cigarette and arose to his feet.

"Yes, Señor Mike," answered Miguel, who, unlike the guide, chose to pronounce his name the Mexican way.

It was just then that Monte came in from the front room and exclaimed:

A wagon is coming down the Gila Trail. Some travelers to stop here. You will keep out of sight, for it may be that they have some money."

"I will come out and have a look at them, while Señor Harlem goes with your boy to watch Young Wild West," said the guide. "There will be nothing wrong in having a guest in your place, Monte."

"That is true," was the retort. "Come on, Mike!"

Big Mike followed him to the front room and took his place at a table near a window.

"A bottle of wine and a glass, Monte," he said. "I will take things easy, for I can depend on Señor Harlem. If Young Wild West and his friends come I will leave the room and allow you to deal with them."

Then he looked out of the window and saw a big wagon, drawn by four mules, approaching, while two elderly men were riding on horseback near it.

The driver of the mules was a middle-aged woman, and at her side sat a young and pretty girl.

The villainous greaser gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Plenty of American señoritas!" he muttered. "I will have no trouble in picking a wife. I am very glad I decided to come straight here."

The outfit came up in front of the house and halted, seeming very glad to reach it.

"Hello, there!" called out one of the men, as he dismounted. "I reckon we kin git a little accommodation here, can't we, boss?"

"Certainly," answered Monte, who was at the door. "I keep what the Americanos call an inn. It is open to all travelers who have the money to pay."

"Well, we ain't got very much money, but I reckon we've got enough ter buy a little wine an' somethin' ter eat, fur a change."

"Come right in," said Monte.

They all obeyed as soon as the horses had been given free rein to graze upon the luxuriant patch of grass that was near at hand.

But it was little that they thought that they were entering a death trap.

CHAPTER XI.

HOP AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

Charlie quickly saw the house Wild was pointing to, and he gave an exclamation of surprise.

Then our hero called the attention of the rest of the party.

"I never had any idea that we were so close to a habitation as this, Wild," Arietta declared.

"No, nor I didn't, either, Et," was the reply. "But there is certainly some one living there, or there would not be a fire. I can't exactly see a chimney, but I can see the smoke coming from about where one ought to be."

"We'll soon find out all about it," said the scout,

shrugging his shoulders. "It might be a ranch house that we see, an' ther other buildin's is around ther other side of that hill."

This seemed to be the general opinion, so they all rode forward, and half an hour later they could see the little house quite plainly.

In that region, where the air was so clear, they could see a long distance, so it was well past noon when they finally came within an easy distance of the house, shanty, or whatever it might be called.

As the trail of Big Mike and his two companions led right up to the building, Wild decided that it was best that they be a little cautious.

The greaser guide claimed to know that part of the country pretty well, and it might be that some one lived at the house who might assist him in putting up a fight against them.

The boy turned to his companions and said:

"I reckon we'll stop right here at the side of the road. There is no use in riding on around that bend over there and giving the galoots a chance to mow us down. This is good enough, so we will stop here for a while. There's a stream right over there, so we can have our dinner right here."

"That's a good idea, Young Wild West," spoke up Stark, looking relieved. "There ain't no tellin' jest what Big Mike is up ter. He's over in that shanty, yer kin bet yer life!"

"Did you hear him say anything about a shanty being here?" Wild queried.

"No; he never said a word. But I'm putty sartin that he knows ther way ter Yuma, though. I've heard him say two or three times that he'd been there lots of times."

"Well, if that is the case, and he came and went this way, he certainly knew about that thatched roof shanty. That means that we must look out for it. Hop, you and Wing get a hustle on you. We want something to eat. Instead of us going to the shanty, we'll wait for some one to come to us from it."

Under the shade of a couple of widespread trees they dismounted, and then the work of pitching a temporary camp was quickly gone through.

Hop started a fire, and then Wing got the coffee pot and hung it over it.

It was just then that a young Mexican was seen coming out of a fringe of high bushes to the left, about a hundred yards from the house.

"I reckon we'll find out something now," said our hero, as he noticed that the Mexican was heading straight toward them, carrying a gun, as though he was out hunting for game.

"How do, senors?" said the fellow, who was no other than Miguel, the son of the keeper of the ranch-inn. "Why do you stop here? You can get what you want to eat at my father's house, and he will not overcharge you for it."

"Well, we're in the habit of eating outside, and as we have got plenty of grub with us we thought we'd stop right here," answered our hero, as he sized him up. "Besides, there are two or three people at your father's shanty that we haven't much use for. If we went there

it is most likely there would be some shooting done, and then your father would be upset considerably."

Wild put the young fellow down as a crafty villain right away, for he noted the effect of his words as he spoke them.

Miguel seemed to be very anxious to get them to the house, however.

He began urging them to go on, declaring that he was quite sure that his father would charge them nothing for food and wine, as he was a very liberal man.

But this only strengthened Wild's suspicions.

The rest could easily understand it, too.

Miguel now sat down and tried to get up a conversation with the girls.

He was not very successful in this, so he turned to the two Chinamen.

Wing was too busy to bother with him, but Hop gladly joined in and talked with him.

Probably Hop had his reasons for so doing.

He had heard the Mexican say that his father had plenty of wine at the house.

"You verry nicee boy," he observed, after he had told him that he was a very smart Chinee. "Me allee samee likee you."

Miguel grinned at this, for he thought he had found some one who would pay a little more than ordinary attention to him.

"You verra much flatter," he said. "You come with me and I give you some wine. Then you can tell your masters that my father keeps a verra nice roadside inn."

Hop cast a glance at our hero, who promptly nodded, and then he knew he was at liberty to go.

Wild thought it was no risk in letting the Chinaman go, as the villains would not be apt to bother him, in order to draw the rest of the party there.

Hop arose from where he was sitting, and, nodding to the Mexican, promptly set out for the house.

Miguel hurried and caught up with him.

"You allee samee givee me some wine," he said. "Let me showee you verry nicee lillee tick, so be."

"Verra good!" was the reply, though it was doubtful if the greaser knew exactly what was meant by "a nicee lillee tick."

But he was going to find out, however.

Hop was clever enough to fool Miguel, or his crafty father, either.

The two soon reached the inn, and as Hop was going inside he was just in time to catch a glimpse of a man going through a doorway into another room.

He recognized the form of Big Mike, but he did not appear to notice anything, much to the satisfaction of Miguel.

The party of travelers were sitting at a big table, waiting to be served with something to eat and drink, and when he saw them the Chinaman was all smiles.

"Allee samee verry nicee hotel," he said to his escort.

"Yes, we make a pretty good business sometimes," was the reply. "We raise da cattle and da sheep, and we sell plenty chickens in Gila; plenty eggs, too."

Monte came in just then with a trayful of edibles, and

he was surprised to see the Chinaman there in company of his son.

The latter quickly said something in his own tongue, and then the old man put on a smile and nodded pleasantly to Hop, who returned it with interest.

"Me likee havee lille tanglefoot," he said to Miguel; "me no likee wine velly muchee."

Probably it was because he saw that one of the men of the traveling party had something in a glass that looked very much like whisky that made him say this.

"I treat you to whisky," said the young Mexican, who knew very well what was wanted.

He got a bottle and glass from behind the little counter in a corner of the room, and soon Hop was really enjoying himself.

"You allee samee havee thlee men here lille while ago?" he asked, as he filled his glass a second time.

"Yes," answered Miguel, almost eagerly. "They go on; they turn that way," pointing to the right of the road. "They no want to pay for whisky they have. My father say get out, and they go; but they no pay."

Hop grinned, as though he thought it funny. But he knew better than that, since he had seen Big Mike go into the adjoining room.

The two men and the woman and girl were having a good time of it with the dinner now, and they paused between mouthfuls to smile at the Chinaman, who was having so much to say.

"Them velly muchee bad thlee men," went on Hop, shaking his head, and then he helped himself to the whisky again.

"Yes, verra bad men," Miguel declared.

"Ley allee samee wantee shootee Young Wild West."

"Who Young Wild West?" queried Miguel.

"He velly muchee deadshot, so be. He talkee to you when you allee samee comee out lere."

"Oh, he the boy with the long hair?"

"Yes, lat Young Wild West. Me allee samee workee for him; me likee lille dlop of tanglefoot, so he lettee me comee and gittee, so be."

It was evident that Monte was satisfied that the traveling party did not have much money, for he took his pay and did not try any of his crooked work on them.

They went out, after being there about half an hour, and soon they were going on their way.

But they took the fork of the road that went toward Yuma, so our hero and those with him did not see them.

Hop had found out enough to satisfy him that the three villains were hiding somewhere in the house, but he could not resist the temptation to show Miguel the "nicee lille flick" he had spoken of.

He pulled a twenty-dollar gold piece from his pocket and placed it on the table.

The eyes of the young Mexican glistened, and, hearing the jingle of the coin, his father hastened over to see what was going on.

"Velly nicee money, so be," said Hop; and then he pulled two more gold pieces out and put them by the other.

Next came a greasy pack of cards.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VILLAINS LOSE A LITTLE MONEY.

Harlem, the villainous ally of the greaser guide, concluded that he had better return to the house after he saw Miguel and the Chinaman start for it.

He had remained hiding out of sight while the young Mexican went over to where Young Wild West's party had come to a halt, and now he wanted to find out what kind of a game Miguel was trying to work with the Chinaman.

He got back to the shanty and entered it by the back way.

Big Mike and Pablo were sitting in a small room that opened into the kitchen, and as he came in he found their faces wreathed in smiles.

"What's ther heathen doin' here?" he asked.

"He come to find out if we are here, most likely," the guide replied. "He go back pretty soon and tell Young Wild West we no here. Then Young Wild West come. Verra good!"

"I see."

Then Harlem looked around the room and saw a couple of hunting coats hanging on the wall.

They were of buckskin, and similar to those that our hero and his partners wore when it was not too hot.

The villain promptly put one of them on.

'Then he made a further search and found a wig of long, black hair on a shelf.

These articles were kept there for use when the villainous keeper of the roadside inn wished to disguise himself or his son.

Harlem donned the wig, and then he looked at himself in the cracked glass that hung on the wall.

"I reckon that Chinee won't know me now," he said. "I'll go on around an' come in ther front door. Then I kin find out jest what he's up ter. What do yer say, Mike?"

"That verra good," answered the guide, nodding his approval. "The senor knows his business. Go on out pretty soon, and tell us what the Chinee do."

Harlem went outside, the wife of the innkeeper looking at him in surprise when she saw that he was disguised.

But she said nothing, for she knew the men were friends of Monte, and that meant that they could do as they saw fit.

The villain went on around to the front of the house and entered the door after a wait of about twenty minutes.

The travelers had gone, and he wondered why it was that the crafty Mexican had let them go without cleaning them out of all the money they had.

But he decided that they could not have had any, and then he turned his attention to Miguel and his guest.

He happened in just as Hop had put the three gold pieces on the table and produced the pack of cards.

If Monte was interested, so was he.

The two Mexicans turned at his approach, and neither of them recognized him at first.

But a wink from him let them know, and then he paused to watch what was going to take place.

"Lere um twenty-five dollee," Hop said, making out that he did not notice the man. "Me allee samee bettee me namee um card me cut, after you shuffle, so be."

This was said to Miguel, the clever Chinaman making out that he was not paying any attention to the other two in the room.

"Me shuffle da cards, and then you tell what you cut?" repeated Miguel, showing great interest and looking at the gold coins longingly.

"Lat allee samee light," answered Hop. "Me velly muchee smartee Chinee."

"I'll take that bet, Heathen," spoke up Harlem, who was a gambler by nature, and who could not resist the temptation, even if he knew that the money could be taken from the Chinaman without going to the trouble of winning it.

He happened to have more than twenty-five dollars with him, so he quickly counted out the amount and placed it on the table.

Then he took up the deck, straightened out the cards and shuffled them.

"Now, then, what are yer goin' ter cut?" he asked, as he put the pack on the table before Hop.

"Um ace of clubs," was the quick reply.

"An' if yer don't I win ther money, don't I?"

"Lat allee samee light."

"All right. Go ahead."

Hop cut the cards and held up the cut.

It was the ace of clubs.

He grabbed the money very quickly, and when it went in his pocket the pack of cards did the same.

The three men looked amazed.

"You do dat some more?" queried Monte, his little eyes glistening.

"Yes, me do some more, so be," was the reply.

"Me make bet of a-fifty dollar!"

"Allee light."

Out came a pack of cards, but it was not the same one.

The tricky Chinaman had several packs on his person, and some of them was rather queer packs, too.

The one he had just used was made up entirely of cards of the denomination of the ace of clubs.

That made it easy for him to make that particular cut.

Any one could have done it.

The deck he now had was made up of queens of diamonds, but the backs were the same as the others he had used, so no one dreamed of there being anything wrong with the pack.

Monte, thinking he would be a sure winner, put up his fifty dollars.

Hop quickly covered it, and then handed him the cards, so he might shuffle them.

If the crafty Mexican had thought to look them over he would have discovered the trick.

But he did not, and when he had given them a good shuffling he placed them on the table.

"What card you cut now?" he questioned.

"Um queen of diamonds," answered Hop, after thinking a moment.

"Me bet da fifty dollar you do not cut da queen of diamond."

"Allee light."

The clever Celestial cut the deck in about the middle and held up the card.

It was the queen of diamonds, of course.

All three of the men were astonished.

"Let me see them cards," said Harlem.

Hop thought surely he was going to get caught this time, for the villain got his hand on the pack before he could get it in his pocket.

But not so.

Harlem simply proceeded to shuffle the cards, taking care to leave out the queen of diamonds Hop had cut before, and letting it drop on the floor, unobserved, as he thought.

But this made no difference to Hop, who anticipated what was coming when he saw the card stolen.

"There!" exclaimed Harlem, placing the deck on the table. "I'll bet you ten dollars, which is all ther money I've got, that yer can't cut ther queen of diamonds ag'in!"

"Allee light; puttee uppee you money."

"Me bet a-fifty dollar you no cut da queen of diamonds," spoke up Monte, producing the money, for he saw that very card lying almost at his feet, face up.

"Allee light."

The money was put up, and then Hop looked at the ceiling, as though there was something there he was studying, and then parted the pack near the centre again.

It was the queen of diamonds again, as might be supposed.

No other cards could possibly turn up, under the circumstances.

But Hop hardly expected to get away with the money this time.

He was surprised when they let him take it.

He noticed that the three exchanged glances, and then, for the first time, he recognized Harlem as being one of the three men who had come on ahead of Young Wild West's party.

"You're a mighty smart heathen galoot, you are!" said Harlem, as he stooped and picked up the card from the floor. "I reckon there's more than one queen of diamonds in that deck."

"Me no understand," answered Hop, making out that he was much surprised, and taking the card from the man at the same time.

But Miguel, who had been saying nothing, made a quick move and took the whole pack from him, scattering them on the table.

Then the trick was exposed.

Hop knew he was in for it now, so he brought all his wits to the fore.

He broke into a loud laugh to divert the attention of the villains, and then he suddenly pulled something from his pocket and reached down under the table.

The something was nothing more than a home-made firecracker, and a good one at that.

There was a lighted cigarette on the floor, which had been dropped by Miguel, and Hop was quick in touching the fuse to it.

Then he arose and, pulling out a handful of money, said:

"Me givee um money back, so be; me play nicee lillee tick."

The faces of the trio became wreathed in smiles instantly.

But just then a loud report sounded and the table was fairly lifted from the floor.

A dense smoke filled the room instantly, and, taking advantage of the opportunity, Hop ran outside and made for the spot our friends were stopping at.

He got around the corner, and then let out a shout that was heard by Wild and the rest, and then he knew that he was pretty safe.

The Chinaman ran like a deer, but no one came in pursuit.

Once more the clever Chinaman had been successful in performing his "nicee lillee ticks."

CHAPTER XIII.

WILD IN THE HANDS OF THE VILLAINS.

Young Wild West stood waiting for Hop as he came in, his rifle ready to drop the first villain that offered to shoot at the Chinaman.

But, as has been stated, no one appeared.

"Well, Hop, what did you do, blow the shanty up?" the young deadshot asked, looking at the Celestial and laughing.

"Me allee samee makee lillee firecracker go," was the reply. "Len me havee lun likee Sammee Hill, so be."

"Well, tell us all about it, an' don't stand there grin-nin' like a sick wildecat!" Cheyenne Charlie spoke up.

"Allee light, Misler Charlie; me tellee 'boutee pletty quickee."

Then, while Wild and his partners kept an eye on the thatched house, and also around its vicinity, the Chinaman related just what had happened in the place.

Part of it was rather comical, especially that which happened last, and there was a laugh all around.

"Yer managed ter git about half drunk, all right," said the scout, half jeeringly. "Yer can't help doin' that, somehow."

"Misler Charlie feel velly muchee bad," was the quick reply. "He wishee he gittee allee samee half dlunk, so be."

As Charlie had given up drinking to anything like excess since he had become married, this did not exactly fit him.

But it angered him a little, just the same, because he would take an occasional drink of liquor.

He picked up a tin pan that the cook had put aside after washing it, and let it go at Hop, who managed to dodge it and let his brother get it on the back of the head.

"Hip hi!" yelled Wing, jumping about as though he had been stung by a hornet. "Whattee mattee? My blother allee samee foolee!"

"Shuttee uppee!" answered Hop. "Me no hittee you, my blother."

"Give it ter him, Wing! He's always tryin' ter play some kind of a trick on yer," said Charlie.

Wing had not been looking at the time, and he really thought that his brother had thrown the pan.

Acting on the scout's advice, he leaped at him, and the next minute the two were rolling on the ground, scratching and pulling hair at a great rate.

But a word from Wild brought them to their senses, and it was soon settled.

Our hero had learned enough from the clever Chinaman to make him think that it would be dangerous to try and pass the shanty.

But he made up his mind that they would do it when they got ready to go on.

"No such galoot as that greaser guide is going to scare me away from here," he said. "I reckon I'll go and find out what they are up to, anyway. Boys, just be on the lookout, and if you hear a shot fired you will know that I have ventured a little too far."

"Be careful, Wild," said Arietta. "They are desperate villains, you know. They will hesitate at nothing, if they only get the chance, you know."

"Leave it to me, Et," was the reply. "I reckon there is nothing very smart about the galoots, so I'll manage to outwit them, all right, even if I get caught by them. I'll be back in a few minutes. All hands keep a watch."

"Let me go with yer, won't yer?" spoke up Stark, as the boy was leaving.

"No; I can do better alone, I think," was the retort. "If I don't turn up in twenty minutes I shall expect some one to come and look for me."

Away went the daring boy, proceeding in a direction that was entirely opposite from the shanty.

But Wild did this so he might have a chance of approaching it without being seen.

But he made a mistake in thinking this, for no matter which way he went just then he would have been seen, for Miguel happened to be looking that way.

The young Mexican saw the young deadshot, and he quickly told the others about it.

The result was that all three of the villains left the shanty and took to the bushes at the rear of it.

"We hide right here," said the greaser guide. "Young Wild West will come here and spy on us, and then we catch."

Harlem nodded at this.

"That's it," he said. "Yer kin bet your life we'll catch him now! I wish that blamed heathen would come, too. He sartinly did flimflam us a little while ago. I never did see anything so slick in all my life."

"Me kill da Chinee!" hissed Miguel. "He take my father's money; he play da fraud!"

"Well, I reckon he got all I had, didn't he?" retorted Harlem. "Jest wait! We'll all git enough out of this game, an' then we'll feel satisfied, I reckon."

"We get plenty money when we sell da gold in Yuma," added Big Mike.

Then they crouched in the bushes at a point about twenty yards from the house and waited.

Meanwhile our hero was approaching the very spot where the villains were lying in wait.

Wild was coming with his usual caution, unconscious of the fact that he was running right into a trap.

The crouching scoundrels waited, and pretty soon they heard the light footfalls of the dashing young deadshot.

Nearer he came, and just as he was right in their midst they sprang up and closed upon him from all sides.

It was a case of surprise, and before he could fire a shot or utter a cry the brave boy was rendered helpless.

Four on one was altogether too much odds, especially when he had been taken unawares.

While three of them held him the other clapped his hand tightly over his mouth.

Big Mike had clutched him by the throat, anyway, so there was small chance of his crying out.

"Git him in the house—hurry up!" exclaimed Harlem in a hoarse whisper.

Struggling to free himself, but unable to do it, Wild was carried to the shanty.

Into the little room where the villains had gathered while the travelers had stopped at the inn they took him, and then he was quickly bound hand and foot.

Monte was called in then, and Big Mike looked at him and said:

"We have got the boy we want. What can we do with him?"

"Kill him!" was the quick reply.

"Oh, yes! But not just yet. I want to get the others first. He must not die an easy death, you know."

"Bring him out here, then. I will show you where to put him till you are ready to kill him."

Gagged and bound, as he was, Big Mike and Harlem picked up our hero and carried him to the front room of the shanty.

"Stand him there," said Monte, marking a spot on the floor with his toe.

This was done.

"Now step back and let him be there."

Wild nerved himself for something to happen. But so long as it was not to be death, he remained apparently unmoved.

Monte stepped to the wall and, seizing a rope that protruded from a hole, gave a quick pull upon it.

Then it was that a trap door opened under our hero's feet and he shot downward.

Thud!

He struck the ground only about six or seven feet below the floor, landing squarely on his feet.

But he could not retain his equilibrium, as his arms were bound to his sides, and down he went.

But he was only a little bit shaken up, however, and he heard a derisive laughter of the villains as the trap door was closed.

But the fall had accomplished something for the boy that the men had certainly not figured on.

One of the cords about his arms had parted, owing to the effort he made in trying to catch himself as he fell.

This meant a whole lot to him, and a thrill of joy shot through the frame of our hero.

"I reckon I'm a good ways from being dead yet," he thought. "I'll soon turn the tables on the galoots, or my name isn't Young Wild West, that's all!"

After two attempts he succeeded in getting his left hand free.

Then it was comparatively easy, and the first thing he did was to tear the gag from his mouth.

He did not cry out, for he knew that would only make matters worse than they had been before.

But he proceeded to get the rope from his body, and when it was accomplished he listened for a moment, and hearing nothing that would indicate that there was any one going to open the trap door, he took a match from his pocket and struck it.

It had been as dark as a pocket in the cellar, for there was not the least place where light could come through, and as the flickering flame flared up he saw that it was about twelve feet square, with no visible means of leaving it.

"The trap must be the only way to get in and out," he muttered. "Well, I came in that way, so I'll try and get out the same way. But I'll have to wait till they leave that room above first."

CHAPTER XIV.

HARLEM HAS A GREAT IDEA.

"Monte, we will have some of the best you have in the house, so we can celebrate the capture of Young Wild West," said the greaser guide, as the trap door was closed over our hero.

"Sure!" the rascally innkeeper answered.

As they spoke in Spanish, Harlem did not know exactly what they said. But when he saw Monte bring out a special bottle he knew what that meant.

Then they all took a little of the stuff, which was supposed to be the finest quality of brandy, according to what the host said.

They drank to the death of Young Wild West, and then they took another and toasted the pile of gold that was in the prairie schooner.

This done, Miguel called their attention to the fact that Young Wild West's friends might be coming to look for him.

"All right," Monte answered. "That may be so. Senor Mike, you better go and look for yourself."

"I will, Senor Monte," came the reply.

He did go out, leaving by the back way, and while he was gone Harlem struck upon an idea, which, he thought, if properly worked out would lead Young Wild West's friends into a trap.

"Have you got another wig around here?" he asked, as he took the one he had worn to deceive the Chinaman and looked at it.

"Yes," replied Monte. "Me have two, three more. Me got one very light brown, like the hair of American señoritas."

"Yer have, eh? Jest git it, an' then I'll show yer somethin'."

Monte was not long in producing the wig.

The villainous American chuckled with delight as he took it in his hands.

"That's mighty nigh ther color of Young Wild West's hair, I reckon," he observed.

"Look verra much like da boy's hair," Miguel spoke up.

"We'll see if we can't make a dummy of Young Wild West and fool his friends."

At first the Mexicans did not understand, but when Harlem threw the hunting coat over the back of a chair and then put the wig on top they understood.

"I know!" exclaimed Miguel. "I show how to do it."

He left the room, and in a few minutes returned with a pair of buckskin breeches and a pair of boots and sombrero.

Though they were old and ragged, they did look something like the style of dress our hero usually wore.

"Jest git a pole about ther height of a man, an' some straw, an' I reckon we'll soon have a second Young Wild West ter look at," said Harlem, who was delighted at what he thought was a good ruse.

Miguel got what was required in a short time, and then the work of making the dummy was begun.

As they all had a hand in it, it was soon finished, and when it was placed in a chair it looked so much like a human form that the villains fairly danced around the room to show their satisfaction.

It was just then that Big Mike came in.

His eyes rested upon the dummy the first thing.

"What did yer bring him up out of ther cellar fur?" he asked, looking at Monte in surprise.

"You had better shake hands with Young Wild West, Senor Mike," was the reply.

Then the villainous guide walked over to the chair and saw the joke.

"Pretty good!" he declared.

"That's some of my doin's, Mike," said Harlem. "Now, if yer want ter lead ther boy's pards an' ther rest of ther gang inter a trap, I'll tell yer how it kin be done."

"How?" queried the guide, eagerly.

"Come here," and the man with so many brilliant ideas led him to the door.

"See that bluff over there, right alongside ther trail?" he asked.

"Yes, I see, Senor Harlem."

"Well, we'll jest hang ther dummy over there. It kin be seen from ther place where they're stoppin', if they look that way, I reckon. We'll go around an' lower it down from ther top of ther bluff. Then we'll wait till they come along an' pour hot lead down at 'em. They'll surely come if they see ther dummy, fur they'll think their great, young friend has been killed, an' they'll want revenge."

This struck the Mexicans as being a great scheme.

However, Pablo thought it would be just as well to put an end to the boy in the cellar, and then take his body and hang it where his friends could see it.

That would be a sure end to him, he said.

But the others did not want to kill the boy so soon.

Probably they had a slight fear of the consequences.

"No," said Harlem; "it'll be all ther better ter git ther galoots in a trap, an' then let 'em see how they was fooled. Come on, Mike! Me an' you will take ther dummy out there an' hang it up. But wait a minute. I may as well write somethin' on a card, jest ter make 'em

think we sartin mean business. Give us a piece of stiff paper or a card, Monte."

The keeper of the wayside inn, as he termed it, soon found an old piece of cardboard, and when he brought it to the barroom he had some paint and a small brush, too.

"Harlem was not much of a scholar, but he managed to put something on the card that indicated Young Wild West was a meddler with other people's business, and that he was an example for others.

This is the way it would be understood when he put the placard on the dummy, anyhow.

When he had finished Pablo picked up the dummy and started for the door.

"Me go, too," he said. "Me want to help shoot da Americanos."

"All right, Pablo. But see ter it that yer shoot good an' straight this time."

"Me shoot-a verra straight."

Leaving the inkeeper and his son at the shanty, the three villains went on around, so they would be able to reach the top of the bluff without being seen by the friends of our hero.

They got where they wanted to in a very few minutes, and then the dummy was placed in position.

It hung down over the face of the bluff, and any one to have seen it from a distance would have been willing to declare that it was Young Wild West, dead.

Over the top of it the placard was fastened, and then the three villains were satisfied that they had set a trap that was bound to work.

"How much gold do yer think them galoots has got, Mike?" Harlem asked, for he now felt that they were surely going to get hold of the treasure the prairie schooner contained.

"More than fifty thousand dollar, all right," the greaser guide replied.

"Good enough! How much of it have we got ter give Monte?"

"We have to give him a quarter. That will make it right—one-quarter for me, one for you, one for Pablo and one for Monte."

"Yes, I reckon that's about ther way ter do it. Well, if we make ten thousand dollars apiece out of it I reckon we ought ter be satisfied. That'll be enough ter make things hum fur a while."

"We will get the gold, and then we will all get married to the American ladies," said the guide, his eyes dancing with the anticipation of such a thing happening.

"No, Mike; I don't want to get married. I ain't goin' ter have nothin' ter do with ther wimmen-folks. It's ther gold I want. An' then there's money in that crowd. We furgot about that, I reckon. Why, that heathen Chinee what fleeced us has got a pile of money, most likely."

Big Mike grinned.

"I am the leader," he answered. "I must have the cash money that is taken from those we catch in the trap."

"Is that a fair deal?"

"Yes, Senor Harlem; that is very fair. I make da whole thing. I must have da cash money."

"I know you was ther one what put up ther job, in ther first place. But I've stuck to yer like a leech, an' I've been ready ter do my part right along. I reckon I

ought ter have some of ther cash money, too. There's sich a thing as us never gittin' ther gold changed into money, yer know."

"We wait and see how much money we find," Big Mike said, as though he was anxious to change the subject.

"We oughter have gone through that boy afore we put him down ther cellar," went on Harlem, who was bound to talk about money.

"If he had money when he was put down the cellar he will have it when we take him up," was the reply.

"Yes, that's so. But s'pose he should git away?"

"He no can get away. Monte is there. He take care da boy pretty good. Miguel will help him."

"Yes, an' ther old wom'n, too, I s'pose. She looks as though she was a putty bad one, if she took ther notion ter be."

The three villains had stopped in a little hollow, and by looking over the top of the boulder that lay across in front of them, they could not only see a portion of the shanty inn, but the spot where our friends had stopped, as well.

They waited for fully twenty minutes, and then, not seeing that they were coming, they decided to do something to attract their attention.

"We'll shoot off our guns, an' then yell like anything," said Harlem.

This they did, and then they remained quiet to await the result.

CHAPTER XV.

NARROWING TO THE FINISH.

Wild listened as he stood in the cellar, and it was not long before he was able to understand almost everything that was said by Harlem.

The Mexicans spoke in lower tones.

But he heard enough to make him understand that the Greaser Guide had gone out to watch those at the temporary camp along the road.

Then he heard Harlem planning to make the dummy, and when he had listened and heard the whole thing a smile came over the boy's face.

It will be in order to see what Wild's partners were up to.

"Well, Wild ain't got back, an' it's ten minutes over ther time," remarked Cheyenne Charlie, looking at Arietta. "I reckon me an' Jim had better go an' look fur him."

"Let me go, too," spoke up Stark. "I might be of a great help to you."

"All right," the scout answered. "Come on, then."

The three had scarcely taken their departure when Hop looked over at Arietta and said:

"Me likee go, too, allee samee."

"Go on," she answered, quickly. "But you had better look out this time."

"Me allee samee lookee out velly muchee."

The scout and the others worked around and got into the patch of bushes that ran up close to the back of the shanty.

Once there they worked their way right up to it.

Luck was with them, for the three villains had grown very careless since they had captured our hero, and when Charlie ventured to leave the bushes and approach the window at the rear of the house there was no one in it but Monte and his wife and son.

Charlie looked in through the open window.

It was the little room that the villains had been in when the travelers were outside in the main room of the shanty.

There was no one there just now, so he turned and beckoned for his companions to come on, and then he went inside and stepped lightly upon the floor.

After him came Jim and Stark, and then Hop bobbed up from the bushes and followed them.

As Hop entered through the window Charlie was just turning the knob of the door to go out into the barroom, where he heard low voices.

Hop stepped over to the other door, which opened in the kitchen.

Charlie and Jim saw him, but it was too late to drive him back now, so they said nothing.

The Chinaman pulled it back softly and looked into the kitchen.

Monte's wife was there, busy making bread and doing other things that concerned cooking and housework.

She had the oven of the rusty stove opened, and was turning a pan of bread, when Hop stepped softly in behind her.

There was a big knife lying on the table, and, picking this up, Hop touched the Mexican woman on the back of her neck with the point of it.

She uttered an exclamation of alarm and turned around as quick as a flash, only to find the point of the big knife within an inch of her nose.

"Velly nicee afternoon, so be," said Hop, smiling blandly. "Mexican woman allee samee keepee velly muchee still, or me cuttee off her nicee lillie nose!"

Stark showed her his revolver at the same time from the doorway, and the woman suppressed the cry that came to her lips and stood looking at them in dismay.

"Where um Young Wild West?" asked Hop, as he gave the knife a menacing twist.

The woman shook her head, making out that she did not understand him.

Thinking that it was no use to bother with her, Cheyenne Charlie opened the other door, and then, with a revolver in either hand, he stepped into the barroom.

The father and son were seated at a table, watching something from a window, and instinctively the scout's eyes turned in that direction.

He saw the dummy hanging down from the top of the bluff, and he thought it was surely the body of Young Wild West.

"Hold up your hands, you murderin' galoots!" he called out, sharply. "If you've killed ther best boy what ever lived I'll kill you, jest as sure as my name are Cheyenne Charlie!"

Monte and Miguel were so astonished that they could not utter a word for the space of a minute.

But they had sense enough to hold up their hands, for

at that moment Jim came through the doorway, leaving Hop and Stark to take care of the woman.

"Jim, they've killed Wild!" exclaimed the scout. "See, there's his body hangin' out there! Yer kin—"

"I am down in the cellar, boys," came from below them, in a cool and easy voice. "Just make the galoots show you how to open the trap door!"

"You heard what he said," spoke up Jim, looking at Miguel. "You open that trap door or I'll shoot you dead in your tracks!"

The young Mexican quickly ran to the side of the room and pulled upon the rope.

Open went the trap, and then an exclamation of joy and satisfaction came from below.

Our hero caught the edge of the floor with his hands, and the next minute he leaped upward and caught his knee at the top.

Miguel even assisted him to come out.

"Much obliged, young fellow! Now you can go down!" said Wild.

A quick push and the innkeeper's son tumbled down into the cellar.

"Where are the others, boys?" asked Wild, and he looked at Monte. "They haven't got back yet, I see."

"Wild," said Charlie, "did yer know that they rigged up a figure ter look like you, an' that they've got it hangin' up over there?"

"I heard them talking about it," was the reply. "But that is all right. Just hand me my shooters, which that old galoot has got, and we'll go down there and have a look at that dummy, which made them laugh so much."

Wild got his weapons, and then he took the innkeeper by the arm and pulled him to the open trap and made him jump down.

Then they seized the old woman and led her to the trap.

The scout put her down the hole, and she gave a slight scream as she dropped to the ground.

Jim knew just how to shut the door, and he did so, giving it a good bang, so the latch would catch.

Wild quickly related how he had been caught napping, and then, when he had taken a good look at the dummy, he gave a nod and said:

"Now, then, Charlie and I will go and look for the three villains, while you wait here. If you see us give a signal from up there you will know we have got them. Then you can go and get the prairie schooner and make out you are coming right past the place where the dummy hangs. The Greaser Guide will soon find out that his trap won't work, I reckon."

They had not been gone very long when Jim caught sight of them on the highest part of the bluff.

When he saw Wild's hat wave he turned to the rest and said:

"Come on! We'll carry this thing through, just as Wild wants it done."

They, too, left the shanty by the back way.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Wild and Charlie had little difficulty in getting around to the top of the bluff.

Once there, they followed the tracks of the three men, moving with the utmost caution.

The next minute they came in sight of them.

Then, after looking them over, they went to the top of the bluff and gave the signal, which meant for the party to come on.

Back they went, and they got so near to the trio that they could almost reach out and touch them, if they so desired.

Harlem was talking just then, so they crouched behind some bushes and let him go on.

It was just then that they decided on firing a few shots and yelling out, and our two friends laughed softly to themselves as the performance was gone through.

But thinking that this might cause a delay in the prairie schooner coming, our hero left Charlie and went to the top of the bluff again.

He waved his hat for them to come on, and when he was satisfied that Jim and the rest saw and understood he came back to the scout again.

Charlie's face wore a broad grin, and when Wild heard Big Mike and Harlem arguing about the money they were going to get from their haul he did not wonder.

The Greaser Guide had at last consented to give his American friend and ally a share of the money, and Harlem was satisfied.

To Pablo it made little difference.

He was content to abide by anything his leader said. From where our two friends were they could not see whether their friends had started or not.

But a couple of minutes later they knew they had. Wild and Charlie could hardly suppress a laugh.

The Greaser Guide and his men were crouching near the hanging effigy, watching the prairie schooner as it came around the bend.

They thought their trap would surely work, and were elated.

But if they had only known how different things were going to turn out from what they expected they would probably have been rendered speechless with astonishment and dismay.

Our two friends stood up and looked around the angle of rock.

They could see Jim Dart riding ahead of the mule wagon as it rounded the bend near the shanty.

"Get ready to shoot, and shoot straight!" said Big Mike at that moment.

Then Wild gave a slight nod to Charlie.

The next instant he stepped forward and caught the Greaser Guide by the collar of his coat.

"I reckon you won't do any more shooting!" he exclaimed as he thrust a revolver under his nose. "Charlie, if the other galoots put up a fight you know what to do."

"I reckon I do!" was the scout's reply, as he stood covering the crouching pair.

If ever a trio of villains had been taken by surprise, they were the ones.

But Harlem, as soon as he found the use of his tongue, uttered an oath, and then, jerking a revolver from his belt, added: "I'll die afore I'll give in! Take that!"

The villain meant to send a bullet through the scout's heart, but before he could pull the trigger Charlie fired.

It was a case of life or death with him, and the scout was the quicker of the two.

Harlem uttered one little gasp, and then he toppled over the edge of the bluff to the roadway below.

Big Mike and Pablo both had their hands up now.

Wild quickly disarmed them, while Charlie kept them covered.

"Now, just get that dummy and placard down," he said, sternly.

Pablo was the one he was looking at, and the greaser hastened to obey.

"Throw them down there in the road."

This was done without the least hesitation.

"Now we'll go on down," our hero said, coolly.

The whole outfit had halted before the front of the shanty now, save Jim Dart, who rode on up under the bluff.

"I reckon that was the trap that failed to work!" he called out, as he looked up.

"As sure as you live it was!" Wild answered. "It was certainly a nice little game they were playing, but they didn't figure out things exactly right, that's all."

Big Mike and Pablo were led down, and then the scout marched them to the shanty inn at the point of his revolver.

When they went inside they found Hop behind the little counter, just as though he was running the place.

"Whatee everybody havee?" he called out. "Me allee samee standee um tfeat, so be."

Already he had swallowed considerable whisky, and he was now just reckless enough to start a high old time if he was allowed to have his own way about it.

The prospectors were at the bar, and they grinned broadly when the rest came in.

"What do yer think of this?" one of them said. "Hop would certainly make a mighty fine landlord, wouldn't he, Wild?"

"Get out from behind that counter, you rascal!" said Wild. The young deadshot fired a shot and broke a bottle just over the Chinaman's head, and as about half a pint of red wine fell upon his head, even the prospectors thought he had been shot and that it was blood that was flowing from the wound.

"Hip hi!" yelled Hop, and out he came in a hurry.

Our hero now turned to the two prisoners he had in the place.

"You are about the last of the gang, I reckon," he said. "You have escaped being shot, but you've got to go to Yuma with us, and when you get there you will be put in jail. There is no help for you, so you may as well take it quietly."

"Monte was in da game, too," answered Big Mike, his face very pale. "He kep a place for murder here. He kill many travelers, and his son and wife help him. Monte is a worse man than me!"

"Tie the two of them up, boys," Wild said. "I reckon I'll let the others out of the cellar."

In a few minutes the murderous innkeeper and his wife and son were hauled up.

"Here they are, Big Mike," said our hero. "Now tell

what they are guilty of, besides helping you to set your trap for us."

The greaser guide related a very blood-curdling story.

"I reckon they will go to Yuma, too," said Wild. "But we will have a look for some evidence of the crimes they have committed first."

It happened just then that a crowd of cowboys came along the road, and when they halted at the inn and found it in the hands of others than those they had always seen there they were not a little surprised.

But when they heard what had occurred, and also what the innkeeper was accused of, one of them declared that he did not doubt it in the least, as they had lost a pard, who had started for Gila two weeks before, on the day he had been paid off. They had never seen anything of him since, and the wayside inn was the only place he would likely stop at.

A search was made and several bodies were discovered buried in the cellar.

That settled the fate of Monte and his murderous wife, as well as that of Miguel.

Our friends remained there that night, for it was too late to start out now, and the next morning they set out to finish the journey to Yuma.

Without any further adventures worth recording they all reached Yuma in good health and spirits.

The prisoners were taken with them, of course, and they were finally landed in custody, and the charges made against them.

Then Merril and his partners wanted to pay them a quarter share of what they got for their gold, because our friends had been the means of saving it for them.

"That is all right," said Wild. "I reckon we've been paid well enough now. Look at the excitement we've had from meeting the Greaser Guide! And think of the trap that failed to work! That is quite enough for us, Merril. We don't need the money, and you fellows do. Let it go at that."

So that ends the story of "Young Wild West and the Greaser Guide; or, The Trap that Failed to Work."

But the thrilling adventures that befell Young Wild West during his trips through the wilds of the West and Southwest have not half been told yet, so look out for something good in our next number.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S RIPPING ROUND-UP; or, ARIETTA'S PRAIRIE PERIL," which will be the next number (287) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

At Grossalmerode, a town near Cassel, Germany, a factory has recently been established for the manufacture of glass telegraph and telephone poles. The glass mass of which the poles are made is strengthened by interlacing and interwinding with strong wire threads. One of the principal advantages of these poles, it is said, would be their use in tropical countries, where wooden poles are soon destroyed by the ravages of insects and where climatical influences are ruinous to wood. The Imperial Post Department, which has control of the telegraph and telephone lines in Germany has ordered the use of these glass poles on one of its tracts.

We have all heard the story of the woman who told the new maid to wash the curtains, meaning the lace ones, and came into the kitchen just in time to discover the newest window shades melting in the boiler. But we do not all know that when shades are merely dust soiled the surface can be freshened by the application of hot corn meal. The shade should first be spread out at on a large table and the meal rubbed in with a circular motion of the palm. Then if rubbed gently with a soft, dry cloth the meal and the dust it has absorbed will be removed without leaving any trace of either.

The select committee of the British House of Commons in taking testimony recently in regard to the control and regulation of the condition under which home work is carried on, heard the evidence of the President of the Women's Trade Union League. She said that the difficulty in organizing home workers was due to the fact that they were too poor to help themselves. This witness mentioned the case of a woman known to her who could only earn 75 cents a week by shirt-making. She mentioned the case of another shirt-maker who received only 31 cents a dozen for making shirts. The witness produced blue cotton shirts which were made for 13 1-2 cents a dozen. She said that without charitable subsidies or poor law relief the persons who accepted these low wages could not exist.

Attending the story of every cyclone there is something of the nature of a freak to be related. During the small twister in the Highland district, Kan., recently the almost incredible happened. But we must believe the story, for it was told by truthful men. Between two cornerstones of a barn (Mr. Ruthruff's barn, we believe) the feathers and perhaps the foot of a chicken protruded. The stones were intact and showed no

signs of ever having been disturbed by man or the power of the elements. But the chicken was blown in between those large stones by the fury of the storm in some manner. It was a chicken without a doubt, though pressed as thin as an onion peel. How did it get there? The theory shared by nearly all who witnessed the phenomenon is that during the storm and a sudden gust of wind the barn and the top stone were lifted sufficiently high to allow the chicken to be blown into the crevice, and before the fowl could get out the barn settled down.

"Whoever heard of a church changing its denomination?" asked the gray-headed man. "I never did. Individual members may change, even whole congregations, possibly, but the church, the material structure, goes on the principle of once a Presbyterian—or whatever its particular creed—always a Presbyterian. The founders of churches have very positive ideas in that respect. When they grow tired of the old building and get ready to move into a more modern structure they are willing that the old church be used as a stable, a warehouse, a factory, anything, in fact, of a utilitarian nature, but they positively refuse to let it be turned into a place of worship for some other denomination. I have in mind now a church in first-class condition that was vacated not long ago by a band of Presbyterians. A congregation of Methodists wished about that time to build in that very neighborhood. Somebody of non-sectarian bias suggested that as the Presbyterian church and parsonage were in excellent condition it might be a good idea to sell outright to the incoming Methodists. This proposition, however, was rejected with scorn by both congregations, each declining to profit by the temporal needs of another sect."

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

"Sir, I want your daughter's hand." "You may have it with the greatest pleasure, dear boy, if you'll take the one that's always in my pocket."

Youth (reading cheap and sensational novel)—I'm out of all patience with the hero of this story—the hard work he's giving his eyes. He doesn't deserve to have any. Friend—What do you mean? Youth—Why, first he threw his eyes up to the ceiling and then let them drop on the floor; then he darted them down a long corridor and then rested them on the cool waters of the lake. Then he must have called them back somehow, for it says he bathed them in sad, salt tears, wiped them and swept them with long lashes. Once he was idiot enough to rivet them on the dome of a building, and when I left off he was fixing them on a suit of clothes.

A New Hampshire man tells of a tight-fisted man of affairs in a town of that State who until recently had never been observed to take an interest in church matters. Suddenly, however, he became a regular attendant at divine service, greatly to the astonishment of his fellow townsmen. "What do you think of the case of old Ketchum?" said one of the business men of the place to a friend. "Is it true that he has got religion?" "Well, hardly," replied the other. "The fact is, it's entirely a matter of business with him. I am in a position to know that about a year ago he loaned the pastor fifty dollars, which the latter was unable to pay. So there remained nothing for Ketchum but to take it out in pew rent."

LYNCHED BY COWBOYS

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG.

Four or five cowboys, just in from the mouth of the Musselshell, bring particulars of the raid now in progress against the horse-thieves of that section. The movement against the thieves was organized some time ago, and as soon as word got out among the boys that the programme was extermination, it was with the greatest difficulty that the managers could keep the number of their recruits down within the proper limits. The boys fairly begged for permission to go, and the greatest skill was required to get away without letting the great mass of applicants know of the departure. A dozen or more posted themselves at various points which they thought the raiders would pass, but the latter eluded them.

Since their departure the whole country has been awaiting news of them with the keenest interest. Various rumors have been in circulation, but the first satisfactory account of their operations was given by the men belonging to the party who returned yesterday. The horse-thieves of this section are desperate characters, mostly fugitives from justice from the States or from Europe, who pretend to live by farming or stock-raising. Some of them have families, but even those who have none have huts, in which they live by themselves, keeping up a pretense of honesty. They have stolen from stock-raisers and farmers in this Territory and in Dakota several hundred head of horses during the past six months, and the present raid was organized for the purpose of recovering the property, if possible, before it was disposed of, as well as of punishing the guilty parties.

When the cowboys were two days out they came upon a humble cabin, situated near the Musselshell, not far from its mouth, around which were picketed a score of stolen animals. None of the party knew the man who came to the door, and his protestation that he was a square settler found some credence at first. He was of middle age, with grizzly hair and whiskers, and had an easy and listless bearing. He stood in the doorway of his cabin eyeing his visitors sharply, but making no move and giving no evidence of great concern. Failing to answer satisfactorily the questions that were put to him, and not being able to explain his possession of the stolen stock, he was informed by his visitors that they believed him to be a thief, and that they were after just such men as he. He shifted his position from one side of the door to the other, and leaning heavily against the frame, said:

"What I told you is nevertheless true. I bought the horses. I have lived here two years, and have seen lots of you fellers. I never stole a horse."

The boys parleyed a while. They knew most of the horse-thives by sight, if not by name, and not one of them had ever seen this man before. Some of them were in favor of letting him go, but others said this was a business trip, and the evidence was conclusive enough. He had a lot of stolen horses, and the probability was that he helped steal them. He was a good enough thief to begin with, someone said. If the man, standing carelessly at his door, had watched them closely, as perhaps he did, through his half-closed eyes, he could have seen a rope in one man's hand, and another man climbing a tree which, growing only a few feet from his door, spread its branches over the roof of his weather-blackened home. The cowboys dismounted. The rope was thrown over a limb. The man in the tree jumped down, leaving a dangling noose. Two of the lynchers stepped to the open door, and took the man by either shoulder and led him unresistingly down the little beaten path. One threw his old slouch hat off, and the other put the noose about his neck, drawing it tight, while three or four

men having hold of the other end of the rope stepped off one or two paces until the cord was without a kink.

"If you have anything to say," remarked one of the cowboys, "now is the time."

The man looked them full in the face for an instant, and then, raising his eyes slightly to the long mountain-ranges in the distance, as if peering beyond their ragged peaks, he replied:

"I have nothing to say."

"Hoist away there, then!"

The boys who had hold of the rope pulled steadily and all together, raising the man by the neck about two feet from the ground. Then, fastening their end of the rope to the trunk of the tree, they mounted their horses and rounded up the stolen animals. They camped that night near there, and the next morning they rode by the little house whose former tenant was hanging lifeless in the shade of the big tree. The door was still open as he had left it. One of the party dismounted and entered. He found an old stove, a bed neatly made, a few books, and two or three old daguerreotypes.

"If he was a thief he was a queer one," they all said, "but he was a thief, of course, or how did he get the horses?"

From this point the boys took a northerly direction, and in the course of a week came upon a house known to be the rendezvous of thieves. As they rode up they received a very different reception from the one they had at the hands of the silent man down the trail. Four rifles were thrust through a window and discharged almost simultaneously. The attacking party returned the fire instantly, and with such telling effect that the guns in the house were soon silenced. Presently the door was opened, and a voice was heard asking for a truce. The man was made to throw up his hands, and another came out in a similar attitude. There had been four of them, but two had been killed by the first fire of the cowboys, who, widely scattered, had all aimed at the open window. The two men who surrendered begged piteously for their lives. They admitted that they were thieves, but pleaded that they were unable to make a living in any other way. Neither was over thirty years old. When they saw preparations making for their execution they promised to go with their captors and point out the hiding-place of a big gang near the mouth of the Musselshell. Finding this unavailing, they begged to be shot instead of hanged. The scene was a trying one, but it was soon over. They were tied up by the neck side by side on the same tree, and their dead companions were laid on the ground beneath them. About thirty stolen horses were recovered in this vicinity.

Pushing on to the mouth of the river, guided to some extent by the information given by the thieves just lynched, the boys soon came upon a herd of horses, many of them bearing brands. After consultation, it was agreed that they were probably near a big camp, and that it would be wise to move with great caution. Every man was instructed to keep a close watch on every suspicious object, and it was agreed that under no circumstances was a shot to be fired unless the presence of the thieves was actually revealed. It was toward sunset, and the boys scattered in reconnoitering parties of two or three, each armed with a rifle, two revolvers, and a knife. Three or four remained behind to guard the stock. After dark the scouts began to come in. The first-comers had found nothing, but others had located the robber camp and made a fair estimate of its strength. The boys estimated that there were twenty or thirty of the robbers, all desperate characters, who would rather have a pitched battle than not.

After a long council it was decided that the wisest course would be to wait until sunrise, and then stampede the camp. It was the unanimous opinion that if the raid could be made before many of the thieves were awake, it would be the best

policy, but that if this was found to be out of the question, they must be taken at breakfast. There was not much sleep in the cowboy camp that night. All hands were up examining their arms and tightening their saddles long before dawn. Just at daybreak they moved cautiously toward the robber camp. As they approached it, the stolen horses neighed as if recognizing old friends, but there was no sign of human life. When they were near enough to make an observation, three or four of the boys dismounted and went ahead. They returned presently with information that some of the thieves were bestirring themselves, but that most of them were still asleep. It was hastily decided that this was the time to strike, and all hands with loud shouts dashed into the camp.

The surprise was perfect. Very few of the robbers could reach their weapons, though many ran, and mounting horses in the corral, made their escape. The boys covered seven with their revolvers and rifles, and captured them, the others getting away. Several of them were pursued for a short distance. The seven men taken comprised some of the most notorious outlaws on the border, including Downly, Jake Felix, Jim York and Nosey Bartel. They knew their fate, and met it unflinchingly. Trees were numerous at that point, and each man had one to himself. They were hanged one at a time, Nosey Bartel, the last one, making a short speech, complimenting the boys on the ease and grace with which they had performed their duties.

"I have seen men hanged before," he said, "but never so gentlemanly as this. You do a very slick job."

When the last of these wretches was dangling in the air, it was decided that a party should be sent back with the recovered horses, more than a hundred of them, and that the others should push on in pursuit of the fugitive thieves. It is believed that they have gone to Woody Mountains, and information from that quarter is anxiously awaited.

INDIAN SEAL-HUNTERS

Along the western coast of Washington Territory from Cape Flattery, and separated from the Puget Sound country by the Olympic range of mountains, are various small tribes of Indians, who have little or no contact with the whites, and who are a brave and hardy race of hunters. Their arms and equipments are rude, and, with the exception of the use of firearms and blankets, introduced by a few scattered traders, they retain the primitive ways of their forefathers. Their canoes, which are hewed from a single trunk of a gigantic cedar, are, many of them, of great size and strength, and beautifully modeled, and they are handled with remarkable ease and skill.

In the seal-fishing the canoe used is a small, light one, with a very sharp stem. The crew will consist of three men—the boat-steerer, generally the owner of the canoe and outfit, the boat-puller, and the spearman or harpooner. The equipment is simple—three days' provisions of bread, whale-oil, smoked blubber, and dried elk-meat, and their weapons, consisting of seal-spears, skinning-knives, and a heavy hard wood club. The spear used is a curious affair. It consists of a long, heavy handle of about an inch and a quarter in diameter and some eight or nine feet in length, made of some three or more pieces of well-seasoned yew, dove-tailed together, and which acquires a fine polish by long years of use. Some two feet or more from the end it is split and forks to two points, an inch or so apart. Each of these points is surmounted by a sharp spear-head of bone or deerhorn, with barbs of the same material lashed on at such an angle as to afford a secure hold. These spear-heads are fastened to a stout line made of sinew or plaited sealskin, which passes through a "becket" on the

shaft, and is made fast on the canoe. This line is some twenty feet long.

So equipped they start out on their perilous expedition, launching their canoe through the surf, and pushing boldly out thirty miles to sea. The seals are captured as they float asleep on the top of the water, and the most successful hauls are made in the calm succeeding a storm, when they are exhausted by their long bout with the waves, and sleep so soundly that they can be readily approached. Arriving at the place where there is a prospect of finding a seal, the spearman abandons the paddle which he has been vigorously plying, and takes his station in the bow, where, as the canoe rises on each succeeding swell, he watches for the black head of the sleeping seal. The instant one is spied, a motion warns the boat-puller, who ceases his work, and the canoe proceeds, propelled only by the steersman, under whose light and absolutely silent strokes of the paddle they glide slowly on to the victim.

The senses of the seals are so acute that within any reasonable distance the mere grating of a paddle on the side of the canoe is sufficient to arouse them, when the hunt is up so far as they are concerned. As the canoe silently nears the victim, the spearman, throwing aside his blanket, stands erect, naked and motionless in the bow, poising high the heavy spear. At a motion of his hand the way of the canoe is stopped, and he launches his weapon, generally transfixing the seal with one or both of the twin barbs. The handle loosens and floats to the surface. A steady pull on the line brings the struggling animal alongside, when a sharp blow with the heavy club winds up his career. Occasionally there is a lively tussle, as the seal is armed with a fine set of teeth, and is far from being of a cowardly disposition when cornered, and instances are not uncommon wherein the hunters have been severely bitten. Usually three days is the limit of their stay at sea, when they return to the beach, skin their catch, and sell the pelts to the nearest trader, who salts them down to ship at the end of the season.

In the last few years there has been a change in the manner of conducting the fishery, the traders finding that the work of the Indians from the beach is too precarious and unreliable, and a large number of schooners are now engaged. Indians are still employed in the actual work of taking the seals, and their method of hunting remains unchanged, except that, instead of paddling out to sea from the beach, they are taken on board the schooners, with their canoes, spears, food, etc., and, accompanied by their wives, are taken off on a cruise to the banks, where they remain for weeks at a time, leaving the vessel in their canoes early in the morning, and returning with the results of their labors late at night. The women remain on the schooner, preparing the food for the hunters, and skinning the seals with which they return. The Indians receive no pay beyond a small bonus given them by the schooner owners at the commencement of the season, but are paid a fair sum for each pelt brought in, ranging from \$2.50 to \$10, according to size and condition.

At these figures they make good wages, and some of the more lucky or skillful ones sometimes net for the season as high as \$900. About six schooners from Puget Sound take part in the seal fishery off Cape Flattery every year, as many more from British Columbia, and two or three from San Francisco. This year, for the first time, white men have been substituted for Indians on some of the schooners, and shotguns substituted for spears, but while they have been very successful, the change is looked on with disfavor by the other traders, as it is claimed the noise of the firearms makes the seals more shy, and will eventually drive them away from their present feeding-grounds. All the vessels employed have met with fair success this year.

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